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THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE
FOUNDLING



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THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE FOUNDLING

BY
GEORG ENGEL

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BOOK I

MOORLUKE



CHAPTER I

LINA

"MOTHERKIN," said the sick man, "I see it all clearly. There are twelve black beetles running round the face of the old clock."

"No, no," replied the little woman, in whose voice was a stammer and a stutter, while she never stopped knitting the big grey stocking that hung down almost to the floor. "That's your fever. And the doctor said to-day, that if the fever came back again, then it would be bad."

"That's very likely," said Krischan Klüth, the pilot, and the pain made him crumple up still more under the red and white checked coverlet. "But I've counted the beetles—listen, one of them is humming."

One of the weights of the old wooden clock in the corner fell with a dull sound.

"Six," counted little Frau Klüth. Then she gave a deep sigh. "Now I'll get a light."

"That's right, motherkin; it ought to be bright when he comes."

"Yes, if he does come," said Frau Klüth thoughtfully. "For if you don't invite him most politely, he won't come."

A tallow candle flickered on the birchwood chest of drawers. In the dim light the sick man pulled

himself up a little higher in the bed, and glanced suspiciously at the dial of the clock. Then he rubbed his hand over the bed-covering more calmly.

"Yes, yes—the cursed beasts have stopped their crawling. It's better when it's light. Motherkin, hold the light close to my fingers. I'm cold. That's nice—see how thin they've got."

He became restless again, and struck the side of the wooden bedstead.

"Isn't the boat in sight yet?"

The woman went to the little square window that looked on to the Bodden, and shook her head.

Outside there was nothing to be seen except the empty grey level. The pilot suddenly cried out behind her. The sharp pain had now attacked the throat.

"Motherkin!" yelled the sick man.

"O God! O God!" murmured the helpless woman, without turning round, and folded her hands. "What can I do?"

Then all was quiet again. The clock struck loudly and clearly.

Meanwhile old Klüth had reached out to the chair standing by the bed, on which lay a quid of twisted black tobacco and a pocket knife. He quickly and secretly cut off a large piece and put it in his mouth.

The woman, although her back was turned and she never ceased looking out over the sea, knew what was going on as well as if she had eyes in the back of her head. "You mustn't do that," she protested feebly.

The pilot paid not the least attention, but went on

chewing with the greatest enjoyment for quite a long time, then spat out the tobacco, and shook his head so dejectedly that his white unkempt hair, wet with perspiration, fell over his forehead. "No, motherkin," he groaned, and sank all of a heap; "it's all up. I've chewed for fifty years, and for the last four days I haven't been able to manage it at all—that's a sign from Heaven."

"So it is. You don't even care for that," agreed the little elderly woman, and with a hopeless gesture again folded her hands. Then, as if terrified, she went on knitting at the grey stocking.

.
At the same time a yawl, chained to the stone parapet, was lying close under the windows of the pilot's cottage. She was laden from stem to stern with potatoes, and belonged to Johann Christian Petersen. At least, his name stood in gold letters on the ship's side. But the real captain of the vessel was Frau Dolly Petersen, who had just made a pancake in the galley, and from the starboard side reached up a big piece to Lina, who stood on the harbour edge. Her bare hand served for a dish, but that did not matter.

"Now, eat it, my dear," said the big-boned woman, who was walking round barefoot, her skirts well tucked up. Frau Dolly's two hobbledehoy, fair-haired sons were carting the potatoes from the little vessel over the landing-stage, and filling the sacks with them. When her offspring were not quick enough to please her, Frau Dolly, by way of friendly encouragement, thumped them well in the ribs.

"Oh, motherkin, that hurts!"

"I dare say. You should keep right on."

And the carting continued.

So she kept everything going. Only her husband, in a brown furry suit, squatted on the cabin roof, and, troubling himself about nothing and nobody, played a concertina.

No one had ever heard of his having any other occupation, neither did any one wish that he should have. During the great flood, while he had been busy with salvage work, a beam had fallen on his head and deprived him of his reason. But Frau Dolly, who married him after that event, was perfectly sure that Malljohann, as he was called in Moorluke, had a deep, thoughtful mind, and that as a concertina player he was an unique genius.

Malljohann sat and played—

"Pretty Jewess, make yourself fine,
And then let us go to the ball."

The waltz sounded loud and clear over the still water, and must have penetrated into the sick chamber; for it was immediately answered by a shrill, groaning cry of pain.

"Do you hear?" Frau Dolly began to Lina, while she gave her shoulders an expressive shrug. "Your father's dying. That's how things are in the world. Will you have another piece of pancake, my dear?"

Lina's appetite was still unappeased. She had seated herself on the worm-eaten brown railing, and was idly swinging her bare white legs between the ship and the wooden wall.

For a girl of fourteen, she was strikingly pretty and supple.

Suddenly she lifted her dark head, with the remarkable shining eyes, and said in a tone of decision, pointing to the little window of the pilot's house, "He's not my father."

"Who is, then?" asked Frau Dolly anxiously, although she knew quite well that the child was right.

"He's only my foster-father," replied Lina, eating her pancake; "my real father is the bogey-man."

"Oh, indeed!" shouted the woman, horrified, and squinted up to Malljohann to see if he had understood the child. "Did you hear? But who is the bogey-man, Lina?"

The woman-captain's courage had almost given out.

"The bogey-man?"

"Yes."

The little girl swung her bare legs again, and then returned, positively, as if giving an answer in school—

"The bogey-man is a water-sprite."

"And you're such a creature's daughter?"

"Yes, that's so," Lina affirmed gravely, and wiped her sticky fingers on her apron.

"O God! O God!" shrieked Frau Dolly, and beat her hands together in terror. And her sons left off the carting. And Malljohann finished his "Pretty Jewess" with a shrill lament, and pursed up his smooth-shaven face into a hundred wrinkles—and everybody stared at Lina.

"My dear child, whoever told you such a thing?" stammered Frau Dolly at last.

Lina stood to her guns.

"Old Kusemann told me," she burst forth quickly, "and Hann says so too."

"Old Kusemann?" repeated Frau Dolly, now really angry, and yet a little triumphant. "Did you hear that? The lying old pilot! And Hann! Hann's an idiot."

"Yes, he is stupid," Lina felt bound to agree. Then she pursed her red lips into a mischievous smile.

At that point the idyll was unpleasantly interrupted. Such an indescribable, raging howl was heard from the sickroom above, that all on the ship shrank with terror, and looked down at the deck in great embarrassment.

When they looked up again, Lina lay with her full length stretched out on the hard earth, her forehead against the gravel, while she tore at grass and mould with her fingers.

"Whatever are you doing?"

"He shan't die—he shan't die!" raged the child, violently scattering the stones about. "Why should he be the one to die? Can't it be Hann?"

Frau Dolly, the captain, looked up once more at her husband. But he was leaning his chin on his instrument, and seemed lost in reflection.

"Lina, you must pray to God," the woman at length decided, and nodded her head violently three times; "it's the only way."

But it had no effect on Lina. More and more excited, she struck the railing, and sobbed out amid

rage and tears, "I've tried all that, but it's no good. Perhaps just because I'm not really his child," she added, "like the others. My name isn't Lina. It's Aline. And they found me out there, on the Bodden."

With that, she lifted herself on to her bare knees, and pointed to the grey level of the sea, as if she saw something terrible and wonderful there.

It was extraordinary how the child's eyes changed. Something wild, dark, and gleaming flamed in them. It was perfectly clear that imagination was a powerful factor in the girl's nature.

Suddenly she got up. "Malljohann," she shouted, "go on playing—I want to dance."

"What? Would you dare——" cried Frau Dolly, beside herself. "Fie! what a brat! Her father lies a-dying up there, and she'd dance!"

"Yes, of course, when God doesn't help me, I dance," cried Lina, and, as if in scorn, twirled round on one foot.

And then something unforeseen happened.

Malljohann suddenly took up his interrupted waltz again with all his might. The girl began to turn round gracefully and firmly, until her little red petticoat flapped against her bare legs, and both the sailor boys looked longingly at her. And each time she came round to Frau Dolly, she put out her tongue.

"Will you stop, Johann?" she raged, crimson with anger.

But the man on the cabin roof nodded over to

Lina, and a remarkable crackling burst from the usually silent lips: "Gurr—gurr——"

Frau Dolly was frightened into silence. Now she knew it must be so. Johann had decided for the water-sprite. And Johann had a deep and thoughtful mind.

And with a secret shudder, she looked at Lina, who danced on, getting redder and redder, just under the window of the dying pilot, who howled at intervals.

CHAPTER II

THE KLÜTH FAMILY

THE expected visitor had come. Hann had fetched him across from the point in the red yawl.

He was the shepherd of Ludwigsburg, and an empiric beside whom all the professors in the little university were mere dabblers.

He possessed wonderful natural gifts, and was at the same time a really pious man. Physician to man and beast alike, wherever he appeared he called forth by a solemn silence an attitude of reverence in those around him.

He was upstairs.

Below, on the ground floor, close to the stairs which led up to the bedroom, the pilot's two elder sons waited in a bare room, the walls of which seemed to have been coloured with washing blue. Lina sat on the lowest step of the stairs, and, wrapt in thought, listened to the low murmuring that had for some time been audible from the sickroom. She lifted her head and gently shook herself, as if in a frosty wind.

The magician was carrying on his business upstairs, and Lina did not doubt for one moment that he could bewitch. Old Kusemann, the lying pilot, had lately told her, in his watch-house by the sea, how a little while ago the shepherd had appeared shortly before

midnight in Moorluke churchyard and had walked up and down between the tombstones as if in search of something. He stopped in front of the grave of a fisherman long since dead, and then laid a piece of paper on the mound—a piece of paper. “Just think, Lina dear, a piece of paper, with wonderful letters written on it.” The dead man was that lucky old dog who had had such marvellous success in his fishing as long as he lived, whose net had always brought up shoals of herrings. “And”—Lina jumped up at the mere remembrance, and stared in front of her with wide-opened eyes—“exactly as the church clock struck midnight, the grave opened with a clash, and——”

The door above groaned, and then shut with a loud noise.

“Don’t hurt me!” cried Lina in a low tone in her dream, and stretched out her hands.

But it was no ghost drifting down the stairs; it was Hann who stumbled down, and struck his heavy boots against her back.

“Oh, you stupid boy, take care.”

“Lina, I didn’t mean—I only want——” and the fifteen-year-old, thickset boy lurched into the blue room, and with an imploring gesture lifted up his hands to his eldest brother.

“What do you want, Hann?”

“Oh, Paul, Paul, don’t be angry again.”

“No, but as long as he’s there, I won’t come up.”

“No, not that; but you must——”

“What?” broke in the young theological student impatiently.

"You must give me the book."

"What book?"

"The Bible, Paul."

"The Bible?—for Shepherd Sturm? What does he want with it?"

"I must not tell."

The student stretched out his hand. Standing there with his spare figure and thin, overworked face, he looked hard and obstinate.

"Hann,"—he spoke fast and yet with hesitation, like one who had not rightly mastered the art of speech, and his words therefore had something helpless, stammering, about them which went to the heart,—“Hann, I've never done you any harm.”

"No, no!" sobbed the boy.

"You can tell me everything."

In his excitement, the tiresome stammer overcame him again. Hann could not resist the helpless appeal.

The boy trembled. "Paul, you won't be angry?"

"No."

"The shepherd—wants to get a text out of the Bible, and father is to swallow it."

"Swallow it?"

"Yes, swallow it," said Hann gravely.

"And I'm to give him the Sacred Book for that?" returned the student furiously. He had already hastened to a little cupboard on the top of which were a few books, and seized the biggest. Something stiff, boorish, opinionated, was betrayed by his movements.

"I am to permit the most sacred thing that has been given us to be so abused! For—for—

for such superstitious deceit?" he stammered out. He pressed the book against him so that his arms trembled. Then he went hurriedly to the stairs, continuing to speak, full of anger and zeal.

He was no bigot, but the parents of a divinity scholar ought not to lend themselves to such proceedings—such sins, such heathenish witch's work. He would go up to the sickroom at once and turn the shepherd out, by force if necessary.

So he stood on the first step.

But Lina, immovable, her head held up so that her eyes glittered like two fiery points, sat at his feet, and barred his way.

He would have been obliged to step over her.

"Get out of the way, Lina," he commanded.

"No; first give Hann the book."

"What?" stuttered the student.

"Give it him," whispered the child passionately, and defiantly put her arms round his legs so as to prevent his going up. "You don't understand—the shepherd can bewitch."

"Oh, this is because you never learn anything," came vehemently from the student's lips. "But that must be changed. And now leave hold of me at once. I must—I must go up."

He pushed her aside with his foot. Lina fell, and the next moment the angry youth had stormed past her.

Then a fresh voice entered into the dispute. Bruno, the second of the three brothers, sat at the table in the bare blue room.

He was in the second class of the Gymnasium in

the town, and was a nice-looking, dark-haired youth of seventeen. He was his parents', his teachers' favourite, one of those in whom all hopes are centred.

"Paul," said Bruno, in his clear young voice, "give them the book. If it does no good, it can't at any rate do any harm."

The divinity student bent over the railing in order to see Bruno better.

"Yes, that's just like you," he grumbled. "Every word you say shows what you are—always living on the advantage of the moment, no matter what may result, what may be surrendered. No—but there shall be at least one person in the house who has a will and an opinion. Father will call on God, mother in her gentleness has never known what it means to make up her mind for herself. You, and Lina, you live as if in a heathenish dream, and Hann—God!"—he shrugged his shoulders—"Hann hasn't got a mind at all. Therefore father shall have the satisfaction on his deathbed of knowing that there is at least one of his children who can keep things together."

In his eagerness he entirely forgot the book he had been holding so fast. Now he missed it. He uttered a suppressed cry of surprise.

"Bruno—Hann—where's—where's the Bible?" Yes, where was it? Like a shadow, cat-like, light-footed, and for all her terror of death, softly giggling, Lina flew upstairs. Something, big, black, was in her hands.

"Lina—Lina!" shouted the student, deathly pale, behind her.

She hesitated at the door for a moment. But when she heard steps, she bent down and put something through the chink of the door. "There!" Her breath almost whistled.

"Thank you, my daughter," sounded from within.

It was done.

At the same moment she felt herself seized by the shoulders. Oh, how violently this tall thin man could grip with his hands, which were nothing but bones and sinews! And the wild little being felt a kind of awe of him.

"You—you creature!" he gasped. "You're just like a wicked little witch! But wait—all this must be changed. When I once begin to look after you! This dreadful want of education must be rectified. Only wait."

As if he did not realise what he was doing, he shook her violently backwards and forwards.

The child made no sound. Only when Bruno, terrified by the silent struggle, came to the stairs with a lighted candle end, the student saw how her eyes looked unwaveringly into his. An extraordinary calm dwelt in them.

Then he let her go, as if a thorn had pricked him.

He sighed deeply, and turned to go down again, when the door of the sickroom moved on its hinges. And in the broad streak of light stood little Frau Klüth, and she said in her level voice, "Father wants to see you all once more. Come!"

Here her voice lost its calm sound. But she still held the half-finished stocking in her hands.

.

"Yes, now you're all here," whispered the pilot, and raised himself on the pillows in order to count over those present. His hand fluttered to and fro.

"And Paul—and Bruno—and Lina—and Hann—and motherkin—and the old shepherd—and my boatman, Dietrich Siebenbrod—you're all here. Yes, yes, that's my boatman. He was with me when I saved little Lina. Your health, Dietrich! When shall we drink such excellent brandy again?—such excellent brandy. Yes, yes, Dietrich Siebenbrod—you mustn't do it—mustn't always drink so much; otherwise you're a good fellow, and understand your business. Come, motherkin, come here,—give me your hand. And, Dietrich Siebenbrod, give me yours too. I've got my sailing orders—nothing's of any use; even Sturm, the shepherd, who's a clever fellow, too, can't do anything here. Listen, Dietrich Siebenbrod: you must look after my house, for you're a decent fellow, and a good man of business. Yes, motherkin, that's what Dietrich Siebenbrod is. You, motherkin, and Siebenbrod must keep together. And if the pilot business doesn't go, there's the fishing. Yes, yes—that's better, perhaps. A man hasn't got so much time on his hands, he doesn't drink so much. The cursed brandy—Motherkin, I've an idea. You and Dietrich must keep together. And then you'll look after the children so that they come to something. And—and—Siebenbrod, pat my back; I feel as if I'm lying in the sea. Do you remember how we saved the little brat Lina from the Swedish ship, and no one knew what the little creature was called? And so we named her after the ship. Lina, come here. Don't stand over there in

the corner. Every one must die. You were always a funny little thing, and amused me greatly. Yes, motherkin, our eldest is to be a pastor—a pastor—for he's an intelligent fellow. And however much money it costs—yes, Siebenbrod, even if it costs a great deal of money—I am glad. I shall have made it possible for him to be a pastor—a real pastor. And what is our second, Bruno, to be?—he's 'cute and of an inventive turn of mind—he has learnt something. Consul Hollander promised me to take him into his office—shipowner—Bruno 'll be a rich man some day. Hollander himself began in quite a small way, one can never—tell—— And then, when one is so rich! Motherkin, see to it—I shall say no more about it.

“And then what's to become of Lina? Lina—Lina? I really don't know, I can't tell at all. Some one 'll be sure to come along. But now—now about Hann. Hann, don't cry; you can't do anything to help it. You've learnt nothing—oh, Siebenbrod, you must break him in. He's a good boy—can steer a boat very well. You must provide for him here. Oh, Hann, don't cry; you can't make things any different with me. Siebenbrod, pat me on the back—and then ask the pilots to come in. You say my colleagues are at the door. Then let them come up. Yes, that's all right, Siebenbrod. Call down to them.

“Yes, there you are, the two of you, old Kusemann and Friedrich Pagel. Yes, you see, four weeks ago I had to give up work, and now it's all over. Kusemann, thanks for being so kind to Hann, poor chap. But, please, don't tell him such a lot of nonsense.

And you, Pagel—is your leg bound up again? Yes, yes, that's how it is with all of us at the end. I want to know if you'll buy my second boat? A seine-boat can be made out of it. Quite comfortably. And as you've come into a bit of property, you can pay for it down. And you see how it is with me—for the funeral—you understand—they'll need some money. And we've run through so much, what with my illness and everything. If you could give twenty-four pounds—— Less? Well, twenty-one pounds. But it's like getting it almost for nothing—isn't it, Siebenbrod? Well, then, that's settled. Friedrich Pagel, you hear?

“And—and—Paul, come here. You're my pastor—sing something sacred—a nice prayer, you can do that. And—and, motherkin, thank you for everything—and the business with Friedrich Pagel is settled—and Lina—and Hann—everything—settled!”

“It's all over,” murmured the dropsical pilot with the bandaged leg.

“Yes, so it is,” whispered Kusemann, and crept over to Hann. And after a little, he said softly, “I thought I saw something grey fluttering at the window.”

“I'll close his eyes,” said Siebenbrod, cautiously approaching the bed. And when he had performed that duty, he managed to stutter out, “Sleep well, Herr Klüth.”

CHAPTER III

A PHILOSOPHER IS BORN

IT was the evening after the funeral. This is what happened.

The fishermen and pilots who had acted as bearers, and who looked so antiquated in their stiff black coats, and their soft, shapeless, high hats, had departed, after a sumptuous funeral feast. The two eldest boys stayed behind in the room in which the sick man had lain so long, in order to search an old desk for any papers their father might have left behind. They might light on a magisterial order for a pension.

At least, the thought had suddenly come to Kusemann at the feast over a glass of kirsch. If for once in a way it wasn't a mere joke! If only it was true!

The pair searched on, almost in silence. The window was open. They wanted to air the room. The other mourners were down below in the courtyard behind the little house.

It was a small, unpaved yard, surrounded by a palisade over which red currant bushes climbed. In the middle was a low, moss-covered cylindrical pump. Quite in the corner, roofed with moss and shingles, was a small stable for three cows, and next it, hardly bigger than a dog-kennel, a

wooden pigstye. Sniffing and grunting was heard the whole day long. And this evening Hann and Lina, both in black clothes, sat on the sloping roof of the stye. The clumsy boy, like an enchanted little chimneysweep; the girl like the delicate princess who married the swineherd.

Another, and an older pair were in the cowhouse. The widow, little Frau Klüth, with her tear-stained face, sat on a stool and slowly and sorrowfully performed her evening task. She milked her glossy, well-fed cows.

Dietrich Siebenbrod, wearing a black coat, leaned, very much at his ease, against the door-post, and looked on thoughtfully. He held a small pipe in his hand, but he was not smoking. He thought that it wasn't the right thing just at that moment.

The marvellous glow of an autumn evening lay over the fishing village. Trees and roofs gave forth an undecided, dull glow. Light pink clouds floated across the sky. The curling smoke from the chimneys seemed pink too. A deep stillness lay over everything, only broken now and again by a light breeze from the Bodden, and through the trees and bushes the sea beyond changed its colour from green to grey-blue. Then all was still again.

Lina moved on the stye.

"Say something," she said to Hann, pushing his arm gently. "This silence is unbearable."

She was secretly much afraid. For one picture absolutely possessed her—how the pilots had let down the coffin, how hollow the lumps of earth had sounded

as they struck it, and how old Kusemann behind her, apparently without intention, had whispered the words, "Look, when the last handful has fallen, then the soul will start on its way."

"Yes, then it'll start on its way" went through Hann's thoughts also; for, without Lina knowing it, he, too, had heard Kusemann's words. And for the first time—by the dark tomb—a critical question occurred to the ignorant boy to whom learning had been denied.

Now he spoke out, slowly and hesitatingly, into the bright evening, while the pigs snuffled under him, and close by the milk ran babbling into the pail.

"Lina sweet," he began, "did you hear what old Kusemann said? Do you know what a soul is?"

"No—don't," replied the little girl, frightened, and pulled at her black frock. "But old Kusemann said the day before yesterday that it was grey."

"Yes, it's grey," agreed the boy sorrowfully; "it must have some sort of colour. Pigs are yellow and roses red, and so souls may well be grey."

"Father's soul is now in heaven," said Lina mysteriously. "Look! up there! where the pink cloud moves; he is certainly sitting up there and looking down to see the cattle fed here. He always did that. Do you think he likes it up there?"

"I'm sure he does," Hann affirmed seriously.

"How do you know?" asked Lina quickly.

Hann rocked himself to and fro for a while, as if he did not quite dare to speak out. Then he leaned forward, glanced suspiciously at the cowhouse, and

at last pushed up so close to Lina that their two faces almost touched.

As a rule, Lina did not allow him to come so near, and when he did pushed him away.

"I know he likes it," came at last shyly from the boy, who sighed as if burdened with a secret. "But—you mustn't tell Paul."

"What, Hann?"

He sighed again deeply, then said quickly, "I had a peep into heaven lately."

"You?"

"Yes, me."

"What with?"

"Old Kusemann's got a tube in his tower room, and he can look into heaven through it. And he showed it me, too."

"Hann, Hann, what did you see?"

"It was all bright, and moving to and fro, and there were grey specks flying all around. Those were souls. Old Kusemann explained it perfectly."

"Oh, Hann!"

Lina hesitated a moment. Then she linked her arm in his. The matter was so important.

"Did you see God too?"

Hann hesitated, and again sighed. It was too difficult.

"Hann, what was God doing?"

"Lina—I mustn't talk about it. Old Kusemann expressly forbade it. But"—he shook off his burden—"I'll tell you. God was sitting at a big gold table, and all the grey souls round it."

"And what were they doing?"

"They were eating their dinner."

"Dinner? Crikey, do they eat up there too?"

"Of course. I saw the plates and glasses quite plainly. Old Kusemann said they were made of sunshine."

Lina stared at him.

"Is it so beautiful up there?" she asked at length. Eagerly she looked up at the big pink patches gradually becoming edged with silver. It grew darker and darker. Suddenly Lina shrieked.

"Lina, what's the matter?"

"Oh, look up there!" she cried, and, shuddering, laid her head down on the roof of the pigstye. She trembled. She had plainly seen the old, dead pilot ride above her in his pink ship. He had called to her—"Lina!—Lina!"—quite distinctly. Then the boy looked up too. He took off his cap and waved a greeting up above.

"I saw him too," he whispered.

There was profound silence for a space between the children. After quite a long time, Hann nodded gravely, and laying his forefinger against his nose, said, "I thought they'd make him a skipper up there. How I should like to sail in such a lovely pink ship!"

"Do you want to go up there too?" Lina asked, shivering with fright, and her slender shoulders shook.

"Every one goes there who has not been in prison down here."

"And those who have been in prison?"

"They go to the devil. Old Kusemann met him quite recently in Stralsund. He wore a tall hat."

"No, no," said Lina, trembling, and took Hann's hand in hers and held it fast.

After a few moments, Hann said thoughtfully—

"It's really quite wrong of God."

"What, Hann?" She pressed her trembling body closer against the boy.

"Not to have made only souls. Then you wouldn't need to be put in a narrow black box, and there'd be no funeral expenses—and you'd get a place at once in a beautiful pink ship."

At that moment a gust of wind shook the trees. Leaves flew about the children's ears, and one of the cows near by lowed complainingly.

Then the girl was seized with an overpowering terror. Passionate as she was, she believed it was all Hann's fault. And pinching his arm with all her might, so that he could not keep back a hoarse cry of pain, she shrieked wildly—

"You stupid idiot! I'll stay down here—I won't be a ghost—no, no, I won't be grey."

She sprang down violently near the shaggy yard-dog, and put her arms round him by way of seeking protection. And Pluto, who could not bear Hann, howled ragingly up at the roof of the pigstye and showed his teeth at the boy.

And thus on top of the pigstye a philosopher was born. Hard by, in the cowhouse, during the same interval of time, fate decided that all who were now in the pilot's house, clinging together, should quarrel later on, and finally be parted for ever.

The sea, innocent as a little child who is rocked in

an azure cradle, the sea which was to separate the guilty from the innocent, laughed from afar in the evening light.

Dietrich Siebenbrod, the boatman, leaned against the doorpost of the cowhouse and watched the widow milk his late employer's cows. The light sea breeze played with the tails of his best coat, which he was unaccustomed to wear, and a tall silk hat still covered his head. Siebenbrod felt solemnly moved. Therefore he kept silence, and gravely listened to the sound of the streaming milk.

"Tst—tst" it went on unceasingly.

The clock in the neighbouring church tower struck. Its gold letters glittered and sparkled in the evening sun. The decisive conversation began, but at first it was innocent and purposeless, like the beginning of all great events.

"Eight," said Dietrich Siebenbrod; and after winding up his great warming-pan of a watch, he added, "The master has been buried six hours."

"Ah God!"

A sob got mixed up with the "Tst—tst" of the milk; you heard the rustling of the crisp hay that the cows pulled from their mangers, and then the milk ran in jerks into the wooden pail.

After a pause for composure, Siebenbrod continued, "The pilot captain from Göhren was also at the funeral."

And the widow still milking answered, sighing, with a "Yes, yes; they all showed my poor husband great respect."

She drew out her pocket-handkerchief with her left

hand and lifted it to her streaming eyes, while with her right she went on milking.

"I shan't get the pilot's place," Siebenbrod went on calmly. "The captain said the reason was——"

"Drink," sounded from the cowhouse. "Yes, indeed, Siebenbrod, it's very wrong of you."

"But now I'm going to break myself of it," interrupted the boatman with firm determination.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

An interval of quiet ensued.

The widow put the full pail on one side, and before drawing the other forward, turned her worn, fretful face towards the stable door. Then she looked attentively at the boatman, and, shaking her head, burst into low weeping. "No, no, it's too bad."

"What, Frau Klüth?"

"Oh, nothing, Siebenbrod; I was only thinking——" and therewith she began on the last cow. "Tst—tst."

Siebenbrod moved. He had thought over everything during the preceding night. It could not be otherwise. He must do it.

"Frau Klüth," he began, and in deference to the importance of the moment, took his hat in both hands, "I must just ask, how are things with me?"

"With you?"

"Yes. Since I shan't get the pilot's place, and what Kusemann says about the pension is all rubbish, I must just ask you what I'm to do?"

"Why, Siebenbrod, just what my husband said—for, in God's name, we must try the fishing. We've

got to live. And four children don't make it any easier."

"Yes, that's all true enough. But, Frau Klüth, don't be offended—I'm fifty-one years old."

"Yes, but what's that to do with it?"

The widow milked faster, so that the cow lowed complainingly in disapproval.

Once more Siebenbrod counted the cows, and then said quietly, "Yes, it's because of the seine-fishing."

"What do you mean, Siebenbrod?" Pish—pish.

"Yes, ma'am, don't be offended—but they won't accept an unmarried man."

"You don't say so?" exclaimed the widow, in a great fright.

What the boatman told her meant a danger for the orphaned household. A stranger would not certainly take any interest in it, and as for the few shillings her poor husband had left—why, good God! they'd scarcely last six months.

"Pish—pish."

And then Paul's studies—and Bruno was to be a merchant's apprentice (Frau Klüth called it shopman). O God! the uttermost agony came into the elderly and expressionless face, so singularly free from wrinkles. And if Siebenbrod left her in the lurch too? Perhaps he was already engaged? Then she would be quite helpless, with two old boats and four mouths to feed!

What was to be done? She grew very nervous, and calculated painfully the difference between the past and the present circumstances.

"Are you already engaged?" she burst out, with sudden vigour; and when Siebenbrod nodded, a little embarrassed, she asked, weeping, why he had not told her before.

She pulled hard at the cow. The animal groaned in pain. "Moo——"

"Well, ma'am," said Siebenbrod, with more assurance, "I thought it could wait till after the funeral." And while he turned the hairy hat more slowly, he added, with a certain dignity, "Because, before, it might hardly have been seemly."

"O God!" murmured the widow.

Then silence fell between them. It was a long, solemn silence, during which the "Tst—tst" sounded more slowly, and at last died away altogether. Siebenbrod, too, regained his dignified calm. He put his hat on again, as if it had done its duty, and peered attentively into the corner of the cowhouse, whence was heard the sound of deep sighs. All at once a sad voice spoke out of the darkness: "Siebenbrod, will you really give up drinking?"

"Yes, ma'am; I haven't touched a drop for three days."

"That's all right," said the widow approvingly, and fell back into her musing.

"Yes," continued Siebenbrod more calmly; "and the two eldest shall go away, and I'll teach Hann, and when the little wench is sent to the town, then we shall be all serene, ma'am." And the widow nodded in her dark corner, and murmured to herself, "Yes, yes, Siebenbrod; so far that seems all right."

"Yes, ma'am, and I'm delighted it's all in order. For I'm no longer a young man. Don't you bother; I'll help you carry the pails."

The village clock struck nine. The soft darkness sank down on Moorluke. A black swarm of young starlings had settled on the two slender poplars in front of the house, and a hundred voices twittered songs of love and wandering and youth.

And old Klüth had already been seven hours at rest

CHAPTER IV

HANN BEGINS LIFE

ON one of the following days—as yet the children knew nothing of what had happened in the cowhouse—Hann was introduced to the realities of life.

He, with Lina for his companion, was lying in one of the beautiful green meadows upon which Moorluke stands, and which stretch down to the sea. The last of the grasses bend and rock themselves over the calm waters, and whisper to the gnats. Sometimes a red-capped perch would shoot out, and for very joy of life bite the slender blades and plunge back again into the shimmering deep. Hann knew all about that.

He felt it even if he did not see it. His surroundings were the only thing he had learnt to know and to be familiar with.

There, where the green grass was tallest and thickest, lay the two children. Lina was on her back. Around her waved wonderful, fine, grey-silken webs. They were the delicate herring-nets, woven of sea-blue silk, so that they might harmonise with the colour of the sea, and not frighten off the silvery shoals. They were now put out to dry. Whenever the light sea breeze passed over them, they trembled strangely round the girl, like uncanny, fantastic cobwebs in which a goblin child was imprisoned.

It was the forenoon. Bright sunshine was over everything.

"Lina," said Hann, who, in his worn blue drill suit, lay at a little distance from her, supporting his clumsy head in both hands, and attentively observing a swarming ant-hill, "have you noticed——"

"Be quiet," interrupted Lina indignantly.

"I mean, that Dietrich Siebenbrod always has his meals with us now?"

Again a violent movement of the little hand: "Be quiet."

"But why?"

"Because I'm looking up above."

"Lina, can you see anything?"

"No, but it's so hateful when you speak."

"Oh, Lina, why?"

"I haven't an idea. It's just hateful."

"Oh, then, I'll be quiet."

"Please. Then it'll come again."

"What?"

"The beautiful thing."

"What beautiful thing?"

"Stupid boy! As if some one stroked me."

"Oh, Lina dear——"

"Be quiet."

And they both lay down again as before. The fine blue meshes trembled and quivered, and the industrious ants ran up their hill in a circle.

Hann gradually forgot that his little foster-sister treated him worse than Pluto, the house-dog. But it was quite natural. She was so far above him. She was found on a sinking Swedish vessel. Maybe she

was really some great lady, maybe a princess. And he had always heard that such people were very brusque.

"So it's all as it should be," said Hann to himself.

With that he turned again to his ant-hill, and bent lower and lower over it. How the little creatures ran around with their heavy burdens! There were whole processions going in one direction. It was very wonderful. The boy reflected on it for the first time.

Then, unexpectedly, a long shadow fell over the green level. It slowly glided nearer.

Lina half rose, blinked in front of her, and said contemptuously, "There comes Dietrich Siebenbrod."

"Yes, Lina," replied Hann; "I can't bear him."

"You, too?"

"No; he always spits in the room."

"Yes, yes. Let's annoy him all we can to-day," Lina roused herself to say.

And Hann fully agreed, as a matter of course. He was always his lady's obedient servant.

The boatman in his big waterproof boots stood before them.

He had a lean, good-tempered, dark, sunburnt face, dull black eyes without visible pupils, a heap of damp black hair, and a crimson hooked nose.

Standing in front of them, he gazed with delight on Lina's slender bare legs, which shone like satin in the sun.

He thought the little wench pretty. He also liked

Hann. But he considered the time had come when the boy must begin to do something. Indeed, since the future had smiled at him out of the cowhouse, although only in an elderly woman's calm face, he was moved by paternal feelings.

He looked down in surprise on the two children, who lay as dumb and quiet as if he had not been there. Only Lina moved her right leg gently to and fro, as if beating time to a tune. Hann, perfectly still, went on observing his ant-hill.

"Good-morning," began Siebenbrod amiably; for the sunshine, the children, and the hum of the insects awoke kindly feelings in him.

"Don't answer, in any case," whispered Lina; "that'll surely irritate the tipsy creature."

The naughty children kept still as mice.

Siebenbrod could not make it out, yawned, and took hold of his nose.

The quietness, the silence, the curious behaviour, visibly confused him.

Why did the urchins behave like this?

"What's the matter? he grumbled out at last, pulling himself together. "What's up?"

Silence.

Only Lina hummed with the insects for a wager, and led the orchestra more and more skilfully with her foot.

"It must have some meaning," Siebenbrod broke out, still in vast astonishment; for it never occurred to him that the children hated him, or that this meant rebellion. And the girl was no concern of his, though she was a nice little thing. "Boy, are you an idiot?"

What are you looking for in that heap there? Stand up at once!"

Lina turned her head and winked at her companion. He stood to his guns, proud of an opportunity of proving himself before his lady.

He did not stir.

"Hann!" roared Siebenbrod, now red as a cherry; for he understood, and his nose began to tremble and shine in a remarkable fashion, and the two children burst into satisfied, contemptuous laughter.

Siebenbrod lifted the boy into the air.

"You good-for-nothing lout, what do you mean?"

"Let me go!" shrieked Hann, in a towering rage. But the hawk-like claws held him as in a vice. They whirled him round like some article of dress which an old clothes-dealer wishes to display from every point of view.

Terrified, Lina sprang to her feet.

It had ceased to be a joke. Dietrich must surely be drunk again.

"Let him go," the little girl tried to shout, but the words stuck in her throat.

Stiff, rooted to the spot, with wide-opened, terrified eyes, she had to witness the dreadful occurrence, which developed with sinister speed.

Siebenbrod twisted the heap of clothes round with angry strength, twice, thrice, more, and then threw it into the grass.

"Lie there."

"What?—what?" howled Hann, half in rage, half in pain,—“what have you to do with me, you old

drunkard? Nothing. You're only our boatman, our servant."

"Indeed?" laughed Siebenbrod scornfully. "Very well, then; come here, my chicken."

He stretched out his claws again. Hann, in his rage, foaming at the mouth, beside himself with shame at being so ill treated in the presence of his fair lady, threw a large stone into the air—and then—poor boy—— Well, he was no David to slaughter a Goliath!

With wild, fiery eyes, Lina witnessed the exciting scene.

Behind, on his blue trousers, Hann had a grey patch. It shone in the sun as he lay across Siebenbrod's knees, and upon the spot the flat blows of the boatman rang thick as hailstones.

More and more of them, till the sound drowned the sobbing and groaning.

"Now, my chicken, will you do it again?"

"No, no," Hann whimpered.

"Then beg my pardon."

"Oh—oh—— I beg your pardon."

"That's right—and now give me your hand, my son."

Hann crawled up, and with bent head gave his fingers.

"That's right. Now everything's as it should be."

"Oh—and oh—and oh—Lina—Lina—saw it!"

He stood in the sunshine in the midst of the trodden-down ant-hill, and gulped down his sobs, trembling in all his limbs. And the little girl stood before him and looked up at him.

But wondrous to relate, a curious, flickering smile hovered on the red lips.

The grey patch and the bulging curve, how funny it looked!

Again she was on the point of laughing. But her playfellow wept so bitterly that she stood immovable, and nodded to him.

The strange part of it, though neither of them knew it, was that the impression would remain ineffaceably in the girl's memory, that it would release other feelings which would one day cause Hann more pain than his new stepfather's heavy hand, and that the time was not so far off.

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He stood and wept.

Lina smiled.

And Siebenbrod said, contented at last, "Now come."

And they went with him.

CHAPTER V

A SWIMMING LESSON AND A BETROTHAL

HANN returned in the afternoon like a dripping poodle. His blue drill suit clung to his stiff limbs, the water poured down from him unceasingly. He had lost his cap.

Such were the results of his first lesson. Siebenbrod had put him aft at the rudder of the white pilot boat. He showed him when to turn it quickly, when slowly; he explained the position of the sails, and lastly introduced him to the difficult business of catching the wind. Then Siebenbrod put him through a formal examination as to what he had learnt, and when he made an error or forgot anything, a gentle blow, sometimes even a box of the ears, jogged his memory.

But at length came the great event of the day—one that Hann would not certainly soon forget.

They were sailing on the open Bodden. The smooth shining surface looked as if it were polished. The little village might be seen afar off, dim, as if behind a veil of thin blue mist. The monotonous striking of the village clock, and sometimes the barking of a dog, sounded dully in their ears. The fourth quarter of the moon appeared pale in the bright blue sky.

Siebenbrod had paused a little in his instruction. Propping his head with his hands, he squatted on the second rowing-bench, and as they glided along, stared with melancholy at the ship's locker, in which must be a well-filled bottle of kirsch—a pleasure he had once for all abjured.

Who would drink the exquisite liquor now? The pity of it! But if a man wished to be independent and to be admitted into the excellent company of seine-fishers it was truly no joke.

He nodded his head heavily, and then looked across to Hann. The boy had long let the wind out of the sails, and was gloomily dreaming, his gaze fixed on the silvery sky above.

"You idiot!"

"Oh!"

The boy shrank away in terror. So far had things progressed.

"No, I'm not going to hurt you. Don't be afraid, boy."

So saying, Siebenbrod crossed over to him, and patted his head. Then he thought for a while. Yes, why not? The sooner the better. He must learn. It was well that he should do him this great benefit at once.

"Can you swim, Hann?" he asked, with sudden determination, lifting his hooked nose inquiringly to the sunset.

"No, Siebenbrod."

"Call me father."

"But you aren't my father."

"That's no matter. Call me so."

"No, I can't swim, father."

The boy began to feel dread again. Why should he give the boatman that name? His real father slept yonder under the leafy elms which could be seen behind the church. And why did Siebenbrod grin so oddly at the word "swim"?

"Do you see," observed the future stepfather, coming nearer to where the youth sat, and endeavouring by stretching his legs to prevent the little vessel rocking, "that's a misfortune for sailors and fishermen. Every one should know how to swim. My father was drowned, and my grandfather too, because they couldn't swim. Therefore I'm going to teach you the art. You would like to learn, eh?"

"Yes," said Hann, all of a tremble.

"Good, then come over to me—but be careful."

Hann crept up to the standing man, who grinned at him.

Now followed a great joke, and yet it was also a good deed.

"Are you afraid?" he asked again.

The boy shook his head, but his throat felt dry and closed up. He could not speak.

"Then come along. That's how it's done." Seizing him quickly—the hawk's claws were hooked into the boy's coat collar as in the morning—he lifted him high in the air, and whirled him round for a bit.

"You're not afraid?" he remarked. "Very well, then, swim."

Plump.

He let him go. The boat turned on its side as if

about to capsize. Hann sank beneath the surface, leaving no trace.

"Well, well," said Siebenbrod, with curiosity.

In a few seconds Hann came to the surface, red in the face, striking out aimlessly with his hands and feet.

"That's all right," said Siebenbrod encouragingly ; "that's the way to learn."

"Help—help—take me into the boat."

"No, my boy ; then you'd learn nothing."

"I—I can't keep up any more."

"Ah, you think so. Come, strike out lustily. Capital !"

When Hann, after ten minutes, sank speechless for the second time, his teacher pulled him into the boat. He was much pleased with him. Hann must be meant for something great. He had held out a full quarter of an hour by his big watch.

"Capital—first-rate !"

As the boy, stunned and indifferent, sat trembling and shivering on the locker, the thought shot through Siebenbrod's head that the event ought to be properly celebrated. He quickly opened the chest, took the bottle out, and when Hann, growing crimson, refused with disgust, with gentle force he put the glass to the boy's lips and made him swallow some of the liquid.

"But, boy, good kirsch is wholesome ; and don't you see, I'm certain now we shall make something of you—you'll see."

Hann's head began to swim. But that only added to Siebenbrod's satisfaction. How good the beloved kirsch smelt ! Feeling very melancholy, the boatman

again hid the shining ruby liquor in the locker. "Yes, if one wants to join the seine-fishing, one mustn't run risks. But as sure as eggs are eggs, we shall make something of Hann."

Alas, poor lad! He did not dare to go back to the pilot house, when Siebenbrod after their voyage disappeared beyond the red-tiled entrance-way. Yet he was shivering from top to toe, and the unaccustomed alcohol made his head swim. Everything seemed to be dancing on clouds.

And then the shame of it all! Whipped—lashed like an ill-behaved dog! And they must all know it by now. It was certain they had heard it long since from Lina. Oh, if only Lina had not been there! That hurt so. He could not explain why the picture of the wonder-stricken, smiling child was framed in his mind as if stuck there with knives. It tore and cut his heart. No, best not go in to supper, though he would have liked to throw himself down in the open village street from sheer fatigue. No, he must confide his experiences to some one. If only he could!

But to whom? The boy considered. To his brothers? No, no, they were too much the gentlemen for such confidences. His mother? No, she cried, and seldom said anything.

At that moment a concertina sounded through the still evening air—

"Pretty Jewess, make yourself fine,
And then let us go to the ball."

Malljohann was playing on the roof of his cabin

again, while a few sailors and village girls leant over the parapet, and laughed and sang.

What had Hann to do with such cheeriness? No, Malljohann wouldn't do.

But suddenly light came to him. There was only one person—old Kusemann. Yes, he must drag himself over there.

It was quite natural that the boy should take refuge with the romantic old fellow. For this unparalleled dreamer, to whom life seemed one variegated falsehood, a glittering soap-bubble, rejoiced in his own foolish thoughts like a child looking into a cage of monkeys. He needed Hann as audience—and therefore loved him. And Hann passionately revered the old man as his only friend. Yes, the boy must go to old Kusemann in his watch-house.

Carefully looking round on every side, the whipped lad crept along the short distance to the harbour mouth, where a disused bathing cabin stood on the stone jetty. That was the old pilot's observatory.

And indeed there he was, leaning against the door-post. He patted his neat blue uniform and stroked his short grey beard with satisfaction, for in spite of his sixty years old Kusemann considered himself a handsome man, a captivator of women's hearts.

When he perceived the shivering lad, he squinted at him with his cheery blue eyes,—for old Kusemann had a slight squint,—spat out his quid swift and straight as an arrow at the new arrival's feet, and said sympathetically—

“Well, Hann, have they been throwing you into

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the water?" For through his spy-hole and with his telescope he had witnessed the whole event.

Hann started. Here was a fresh miracle. "How do you know that, old Kusemann?"

Instead of replying, he tilted his foot upwards, and Hann saw that old Kusemann's tame raven, Nicholas by name, was frisking about on the roof of the cabin; the pilot often declared quite gravely that the bird revealed to him all possible secrets.

"Oh, is that it?" said the boy, and humbly hung his head.

Then he began to howl.

"Don't cry, lad,"—old Kusemann comforted him good-naturedly, and drew him into the narrow opening. "Listen, Columbus had to go through just the same as you."

Hann, who sat at his feet, went on sobbing.

"Who is Columbus?"

"What! you don't know that? That comes, my boy, from your cursed lack of education—I never did!"

Old Kusemann comfortably pushed his quid about, and squinted, delighted with the task before him, at the moving surface of water over which the twilight was hastening like grey spirits of the mist in battle array.

"Well, then, Columbus—what was he but a mere Spanish shipboy? But his father had got it into his head that he should discover something—if possible, an entire part of the globe—and in order to accustom him to the idea, he tumbled him into the water just as Siebenbrod did you to-day—and look you, what did the boy do? He ran off with a few rascals like

himself, and discovered America. What do you say to that?"

For a short time Hann forgot his misfortunes.

"How do you know all that?" he asked quickly. "Were you there?"

The question excited the pilot to a tremendous flight of fancy. "Yes, haven't I ever told you? I was there, and it was me who aloft in the scuttle cried 'Land! Land!'"

"Then you discovered America?" echoed the boy. In his astonishment, Hann forgot to shut his mouth.

"Of course I did," affirmed old Kusemann airily. "No one can dispute that. And here,"—taking a foreign coin from his pocket,—"you can see the Spanish medal I got for it. Look—here."

Hann looked, and then began to howl again.

"What's the matter?"

"A whipping!" moaned the boy. And then he told the pilot, who listened with eager curiosity, about the events in the meadow, and how in Lina's presence he had been whipped in so undignified a fashion.

The pilot became impatient. The little fellow was not amusing to-day. And old Kusemann was just in the mood for some fun. He preferred to have his fantastic stories followed with all ears.

"Tell me," he asked disapprovingly, "what's between you and the little wench? You're together the whole day. Are you betrothed?"

"What, old Kusemann?"

"Are you betrothed?"

The boy turned crimson. He scarcely knew why. He took the question for a fresh indignity.

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"Well, I mean—how can I explain to you? Do you kiss her? Do you sometimes take hold of her affectionately? And if she loses a handkerchief or a ribbon, do you take possession of it and carry it about with you?"

Hann listened in fear and trembling. Everything that the pilot mentioned caused him terrible fear. The handkerchief, the ribbon, the embrace—all. An agonised curiosity seized him. He quickly shook his stupid head.

"Then I'll tell you something," said the old man warningly; "if you're so fond of the creature, you must fix up things, for later on——" He shook his head thoughtfully. "She's a little witch, and who knows what'll happen later—whether she'll have you? Do you understand, you great stupid, what I mean?"

"No, old Kusemann; I don't understand."

"Well, then, listen. The intercourse between men and women is certainly very queer. Listen, and I'll explain it to you. You see, there are men whom all women love, and they are very high and mighty with the ladies. I'm such a one, for example. I don't know how it comes about. But so it is. An old professor in the town once told me the reason lay in the smell. But, as I told you, I've not thought about it. And secondly, there are men who greatly love and respect women, and are very humble with them. You see, you belong to the second sort, if it's not too soon to judge. And so two young fools like you must be early betrothed and wed, so that your lady-love may be kept from doing stupid things. For later, women won't give you a thank-you for humility,

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it bores them ; and then they do all sorts of accursed things—do you understand ? ”

Hann stared at him, and held fast to the door, as it swung to and fro on its hinges. He was well-nigh too tired to stand. Yet he would have liked to hear more, because there was mystery in the least little word, since it all seemed to have some connection with Lina. He was quite cold with fear.

“ Now, as regards your betrothal—— ” The pilot was carrying on the joke when short footsteps sounded on the stone jetty, as if light wooden shoes were clattering over it, and then a slender figure evolved itself from the damp mist which rose and spread in ghostly fashion along the stone wall.

“ Old Kusemann, is Hann here ? ” Lina shouted, breathless, and bent half her body into the cabin.

“ Yes, here I am, Lina, ” stammered the boy.

All that his friend had just been saying passed through his mind, and he would have liked to run away.

Her breath came in gasps from her childish breast, but her eyes shone with curiosity and excitement.

“ Oh, Hann, come home at once to supper. If you only knew how angry Siebenbrod is again ! ”

“ Does he have his meals with you now ? ” asked old Kusemann quickly.

“ Yes. ”

“ And he grumbles ? ”

“ Frightfully. ”

“ So—so, ” thought the pilot to himself, “ and Hann is to call him father ? ” “ Well, children, ” he said aloud, “ don’t you hear what Nicholas is calling ? ” And, in

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fact, the raven, who must have been freezing, began to croak: "Caw—caw."

"Do you hear?" announced old Kusemann, while he quickly shut up the cabin. "He says 'wedding.' You're to have a wedding at home. Siebenbrod is going to marry your mother. And listen——"

Again the raven croaked, "Caw."

The pilot whistled and gave a jump. "Well, I've never experienced anything like this," he shouted gleefully. "'Betrothal,' he says too, did you hear, my girl? Quite plainly, 'betrothal.' Now come along at once."

He took the children with him, carefully, lest in the thick milk-white fog they should fall into the water. Therefore he walked in front. He heard the children behind him anxiously whispering about Siebenbrod.

"So late—so late," breathed Lina, full of expectation. "He'll whip you again."

"Yes, that he will," agreed Hann, whose teeth were chattering.

The little girl looked at him. Her excitement increased.

Meanwhile it had grown quite dark. A shrill murmur rose from the water, and enormous pale figures danced over the meadows. Then the pilot, who had so far strode along in silence, although he caught every word of their talk, suddenly stopped at a ghostly, high-towering cross-bar.

A forgotten, coarse net fluttered from it in the evening breeze, and spread a pungent fishy smell. It looked as if a giantess in long, trailing garments

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was swinging on a gallows. It seemed to old Kusemann just the place for the joke he wanted to have with the children. He stopped by the pillar.

"Come here," he whispered; and when the children stood by him in the dark, he put an arm about the shoulders of each, and bent his bearded face between their young heads. "Come here,—you must form a league against Dietrich Siebenbrod—that is clear. But the best league between a man and a woman is betrothal. So you must be betrothed. It's true you're a bit young, but that'll right itself, and the formal betrothal can be made later on. Now what do you say?"

Beautiful twinkling stars broke here and there through the calm misty sky, and in his half-dream Hann heard old Kusemann laugh to himself again, as he pushed the two children closer together.

"Now kiss," he ordered.

Greatly troubled, the children kissed each other. The pilot whistled through his teeth, and jumped high in the air, as was his custom when anything joyful was toward.

"There," he said, with a smile of satisfaction, "so far so good. I congratulate you. Come, children, be quick home, lest you get a beating. And when the wedding comes—do you know what, Lina? I'll give you a gown of gold brocade—of course—naturally—a gown of gold brocade, and silver shoes with diamond butterflies on them. There, out in the cloisters, such things lie buried. I know the place. Yes, and, Hann, do you know, my boy, that the old town of Vineta is buried here beneath our Bodden?"

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Listen! At the right time, I'll haul up for you a tub full of old ducats. With my telescope I saw them sparkling just a short while ago. And now, bye-bye, children; here's my house, and my Alvina is waiting—and so get along with you home."

He vanished.

The children ran home hand in hand. An hour later, Hann was in bed in his loft under the roof. A fresh sea breeze blew round the house. It rustled on the thatch, whispering fairy tales, and came through the cracks, so that the boy shivered.

He cowered under the quilt, and could not get to sleep; for all these extraordinary, bewitched things hovered about his couch in the little room: the green meadows and Lina, the whipping and the betrothal, the kiss and the buried town full of ducats. And suddenly the ants from the ant-hill began to crawl in confusion over the wall.

Then he fell asleep. But he thought he heard little feet pattering past his door, and a voice call through it, "Hann, are you really betrothed to me?" Then something seemed to stir among the pillows. But he could only have been dreaming, for the moon was smiling down on him, and rejoicing over all the merry lies, and calling him a "stupid boy."

CHAPTER VI

FRAU KLÜTH'S FATE IS DECIDED

A TABLE covered with a white cloth stood in the middle of the room. China plates were on it, and knives and forks actually reposed nicely on glass rests.

The boards of the large room on the ground floor, which stood empty year in, year out, and was only used on great occasions—old Klüth's coffin had stood there last—were strewn this Sunday with sand in fine circlets. Coarse white curtains hung in front of the windows, and in the middle of the table was a bunch of dahlias.

It must mean something. They all felt it, but no one guessed the import of these preparations, or rather they avoided looking it seriously in the face. Especially since a possible, a credible, explanation was at hand.

Three days ago, at the Michaelmas holidays, Bruno had brought home the certificate entitling him to serve for one year only, and now, as a free man, was awaiting the moment when some one would go with him to Consul Hollander and impart to him this fresh information about the future of his new apprentice. Who was actually to accompany him was not to be ascertained with any certainty. Paul, the student, had already offered himself several times, but was

met by his mother with a gentle, almost melancholy shake of the head. Some one else, then! But who? Siebenbrod? Bruno stamped his foot—that was perfectly impossible. The boatman could not possibly presume to accompany Bruno to the Consul, the elegant Bruno whose clothes fitted him so well, and who for the last three days had been in secret possession of a cigarette-case. Not Siebenbrod, then. But who?

The four children had been waiting for some time in the large room. The mother, quite contrary to custom, had not yet appeared. Only Lina, who had stolen past the little woman's room with her cat-like tread, knew what a strange rustling there was behind the locked door—just as if heavy old silk was being smoothed out.

And, in fact, Frau Klüth did possess an old black silk gown, a piece of real, genuine Lyons silk, that old Kusemann about thirty years ago, when he was still a youngster, had smuggled into Moorluke for the three pilots' wives.

Lina cowered in a corner, bit her lip with her sharp teeth, and wondered feverishly whether her mother was really going to put on such a precious garment. For if that magnificent treasure was to be used, something of the greatest importance must be going to happen.

Hann, too, was terribly excited. He squatted in his Sunday suit of duffle at the lower end of the table, and was dumb with awe at the unaccustomed splendour of the preparations. The large room; the

fine rings of sand on the floor; his two brothers at the window in their black suits, softly talking together; Lina in the corner with her pretty white frock and a red ribbon in her hair; the dahlias; and outside in the streets the passing fishermen, who all nodded so strangely, and looked smilingly in at the windows.

No, it was all so exciting—so—so—— / Something stuck in the boy's throat, his heart beat high with expectation, but he did not venture once to look over at Lina. Since he had been betrothed to her, she had become an object of unspeakable fear to him. From that evening, he had kept shyly out of her way, and had scarcely dared to speak to the little wench.

Then something dark fell across the sunlit window. As if by common consent, all in the room felt obliged to look out into the bright street. What an extraordinary picture! There, on the white sandy roadway, the tall form of the boatman towered above a group of men, and remarkably clumsy he looked, in his best coat and hairy top hat, and to-day even stiffer than usual, for he was pressing a big portfolio to him with all his might, as if he wished to make quite sure of so precious a possession.

They all stood round him. A few seine fishermen, the two pilots, old Kusemann in his smart blue jersey, and Friedrich Pagel, with his crippled leg, as well as Claus Muchow, the strongest fisherman in Moorluke, with the fair curly hair of a Neptune, who was deaf and dumb; even Malljohann, whose potato boat was anchored in front of the pilot's house,

shared in the celebration from afar. He sat deep in thought on the roof of his cabin, and solemnly played with deep reverence—

“Germany, Germany, above all.”

And all congratulated the boatman.

“Thank you,” said Siebenbrod. “I mean to do my very best.”

“Yes,” observed the dropsical pilot with the crippled leg, who had the best head for business, “the house is quite nice. But the roof must be mended.”

“No, no,” retorted Siebenbrod, with a certain air of comfortable possession; “four years—no joke—must economise, save.”

“Yes,” cunningly put in old Kusemann, and he spoke very loud, so that his friend Hann within the room might better understand, “see, Siebenbrod, there are three cows and two pigs. If you let them increase for a few years, you’ll have a capital little herd. I once had a cousin——”

“No, not at all—what with dysentery and foot-and-mouth disease,” declared the new possessor, and cuddled the seine-fishery patent in the portfolio more affectionately. “Must economise, save.”

“Oh, very well, then!—It’s all very nice,” continued the pilot, raising his voice and speaking emphatically; “and mother Klüth’s very well too. You must just shut one eye. If she puts on my black Lyons silk gown, why, she’ll look quite pretty.”

“Yes, that she will,” murmured Siebenbrod in reply, and looked suspiciously round the circle to see

if they were poking fun at him. "Frau Klüth is still in her prime."

"German women—German fidelity,"

sounded from the potato boat.

"Well, the chief thing is the house and the pigs," concluded Friedrich Pagel, with decision. "That's certain."

"Yes, yes; nothing can be said against that," agreed Siebenbrod, greatly pleased, pressing all their hands amid approving murmurs. Then he entered the family abode of the Klüths.

They sat down to the festive board in embarrassed silence. They did not dare to look up from their plates. The drowsy autumn flies could be heard humming on the ceiling, and from time to time a forced "H'm—H'm" came from the boatman, who wished to bring himself into notice. Still no one spoke. It was as if the four children sheltered themselves behind this silence as behind a last rampart.

At length Siebenbrod could not endure it any longer.

"H'm—h'm—Frau Klüth," he began at last, while he rocked himself to and fro, bashfully and in perplexity, by the side of the woman in the stiff silk gown, "I think it's time for the beer."

"Yes, we can have it now."

She got up, rustling; rustling she came in at the door again and put a big brown jug on the table. Then she sank down with her imperturbable face next the boatman, who sat up as straight as a candle in a candlestick.

"Frau Klüth—I'm going to pour it out."

"Please, Herr Siebenbrod."

They addressed each other in terms of great ceremony. Even the beer did not evoke more gaiety; eight eyes looked searchingly and disapprovingly toward the centre of the table, as though a couple sat there who were about to commit a terrible offence. At length Siebenbrod rubbed his hand energetically over his head, and turned to the widow half in despair.

"Frau Klüth, must I do it now?"

A moment's silence. Then a deep breath: "Yes, Herr Siebenbrod, it's the only way."

"Well, then——" The boatman gave a violent jerk, opened his mouth, and looked at each of the four children as though asking indulgence.

"Well, then—Paul, Bruno, Hann and Lina—I've got it now."

"What have you got?" asked the divinity student slowly, without taking his gloomy eyes off him.

"The seine-fishery patent, Herr Paul."

Siebenbrod took the paper out of his pocket, and held it up as if it were a protection or an explanation.

"Well, what follows from that?" inquired the student unmercifully.

"What follows from that?" Siebenbrod looked round the table in bewilderment, blew his nose, and opened his mouth again. Why, what could follow but what was so obvious? Great God—great God—such a learned man—what absurd ceremony! "Why, hang it all," he stammered,—“that I'm to take over everything here."

"Indeed? But that was settled before. That's of no consequence."

When the fisherman saw himself driven into a corner, he fell into despair. He stretched his legs, put one hand on the table, and said in a resigned tone, "Yes, that's all right enough—but we have agreed—to get married."

And Frau Klüth looked at each of her children with her expressionless face, and added sadly, "Believe me, it's the only thing to be done."

A fresh, oppressive silence followed the explanation. Between dinner and coffee, the boatman, glad to escape from the sullen reserve, loitered for a short while by the river and Malljohann's boat, whilst the children noticed that Paul sat in a corner with his mother, and heard broken, whispered words.

"Paul, dear Paul, don't do that."

"It's better so—then I shan't want anything more from you."

"But how will you begin?"

"Private lessons."

"Oh, Paul—I give it gladly—I'm doing it entirely for your sake."

"Yes—yes, but in memory of my father—I can't bear it—to-morrow I'll move into the town."

Then the mother embraced her eldest son, and the hard-hearted youth was heard to give a sob. Bruno stood by the window and looked out. He was also in a bad mood. But he thought more of what his city acquaintances—particularly what Consul Hollander, who had been one of old Klüth's patrons—would say

to this speedy betrothal. The two little ones, Hann and Lina, crept out, hanging their heads.

The children stopped in front of the row of drooping, broken sunflowers in the rough, untidy garden, which, like all the Moorlücke gardens, looked as if it had been pulled to pieces and devastated by the north-easters. The calyx was already withered and yellow, and the big flowers hung down desolate, feeble, and old, as if they knew that the next north wind would scatter them with a scornful laugh into the water. There was a lack of repose about the whole spot. It contained crooked, ill-kept beds of carrots and parsley, with here and there a stunted apple tree crippled by the wind.

A rough breeze whistled through the foliage, and sun and grey cloud were struggling for mastery in the sky.

The girl bent one of the sunflowers down to her, and stood pulling the petals one after another off the sickly head. A yellow carpet gradually formed at her feet, until the wind carried it away.

"Lina, dear," began Hann, who stood behind her, and in his misery forgot his fear of her, "do you see, old Kusemann's Nicholas was right? Father is forgotten—and they are betrothed."

Now she ought to have asked him what were the doubts that troubled him. Instead, she kept silence—why, she did not know. Perhaps from obstinacy, or because she was accustomed to let her moods have their way with the faithful companion who followed

her everywhere. She was silent, and pulled the petals off faster.

"Lina, darling," continued Hann shyly, fixing his eyes on his boots in his embarrassment: "betrothal?—that's a very solemn thing."

Still she did not move, but she glanced at him sideways. The forward, precocious child remembered that her faithful playfellow had lately kissed her. In fact, she was actually betrothed to him. She pursed up her lips. What had he got to say to her?

"Lina, pet," stammered the boy,—for the ideas he had been evolving would not stay in his dull brain, but broke loose like a flock of shrieking geese scuttling across the road,—“Lina, there must be something behind a betrothal. We”—he got crimson—“we are also betrothed—as old Kusemann said—but—we—Lina, don't be angry—we like each other! Dietrich Siebenbrod and mother can't stand each other, and yet they're betrothed. That such things should be allowed!” Full of thought, he stopped.

She continued to turn her back on him. Then slowly, with an unconsciously coquettish movement she turned her head and looked at him inquiringly and wonderingly with her brown eyes. She waited. He must certainly have something very beautiful to say. It seemed as if soft, tender music was sounding round her in the autumnal garden. Much later the scene came back to her, like a dimly coloured childish dream, full of promise and expectation. The ribbon in her hair fluttered in the wind like a red flag; the full red lips trembled with cold and curiosity. “You like me?” she burst out.

"Yes," replied Hann, in terror. "I told you so."

"I like you too," whispered Lina, and with a quick movement reached him her plump, pink hand.

Then his philosophy spoiled it all; the cursed methodical habit of thinking, all unskilled as he was at the game, undid him now.

He gave the conversation a different turn, and drawing back violently in great fear of the outstretched hand, said, "Perhaps the registrar won't accept mother and Siebenbrod. When he learns that they don't care for each other, maybe he'll send them away again."

Lina still waited. Her hand sank slowly down, for Hann had already withdrawn behind the apple tree. A sudden gust of wind blew through the branches and threw the hard fruit to the ground.

Then Lina, in rising anger, plucked a big sunflower which hung its head behind her, from its stalk, and struck the boy with it in the face with all her strength. It sounded hard against his skin.

"Lina!" he shouted in astonishment, "what are you doing?"

At the same moment a carriage rolled along the village street, and stopped at the Klüths' house.

"Stupid creature!" shouted the girl, and then ran with fluttering skirts towards the brilliant equipage.

CHAPTER VII

BRUNO

CONSUL HOLLANDER was a surly man. Although he had four handsome horses in his stables, out of spite towards himself and his family he seldom used them. He detested luxury, and so he often felt ashamed of his beautiful possessions.

But occasionally, as to-day, he was forced to yield to the request of his daughter Dina, who did not altogether fit in with the quiet, lonely merchant's dwelling; then the horses were harnessed to the comfortable, old-fashioned carriage, and the old coachman, stiff as a poker in his faded livery, sat on the box. The Consul, very cross, occupied the back seat, his stick with the English handle pressed hard against his chin, and without ceasing murmured sounds of discontent, which ran something like this:—

“The animals run the risk of getting every conceivable disease on this confounded rough paved road. The jolting is harmful in the highest degree. And the whole thing merely to pleasure the women! They must be seen abroad—and at the most important business-time of the day, too.”

And he turned to his sister, an unmarried lady, who sat by him, and, in her voluminous petticoats, appeared

like a powdered portrait of the rococo period, and with ironical politeness and a cynical smile, asked—

“Did I tread on your skirt? I’m so sorry, but how can I help it in this narrow box?”

The two ladies were so accustomed to such remarks that they paid no attention to them. The aunt was engaged, with unfailing good-humour, in showing her niece Dina, who had not long returned from a Swiss boarding-school, all the interesting sights they passed. She was not in the least disturbed that the same thing occurred every time they drove out. And the elegant young lady, who looked so fair, so fashionable, and so refined, always nodded her head and said, “Thank you, thank you.”

When the Consul got near the Klüths’ house, he suddenly gave old John a gentle poke in the back. “Stop!” He had some business to see to there.

Something personal had bound him to old Klüth, who had once been a ship’s carpenter in his dock-yard. A new generation, more cultivated and civilised, was about to enter into relations with him. He ought to inspect them first. Who knows what might be behind it all? He did not think much of these new-fangled times.

The two ladies sat on two chairs which little Frau Klüth had dusted with anxious and unnecessary zeal. The Consul stood in the middle of the room, his stick still pressed against his smooth-shaven chin, and with grey eyes that seemed large beneath his white

eyebrows, looked down at Bruno, who, silent and uncomfortable, stood stiffly before his future chief.

The rest of the family stood round the wall. They held their breath for fear of offending the mighty commercial lord, while Siebenbrod, hitching up his trousers at intervals, accompanied all the Consul's remarks with an assenting "Of course, of course—that's quite right, Consul."

Hollander put Bruno through a searching examination as to his education, and remarkable to state—at every fresh piece of knowledge that his future apprentice disclosed, a doubtful "Well, well," escaped from the merchant.

"English?"

"My certificate says good."

"Really, really?" grunted Hollander. And when he had looked at Bruno's handwriting, he shook his head suspiciously, and said in a hard, forbidding tone, as if he felt little confidence, "That's all very fine and good, no doubt, but the most important thing rests elsewhere. Do you know where?"

"No," replied Bruno candidly, after thinking a little.

"It lies in loyalty and honesty," grumbled Hollander.

"Oh, Consul," little Frau Klüth allowed herself to add at this point, "that goes without saying."

"Well, well, we shall see. I mean an honesty that is seldom seen in business nowadays, and a loyalty of the highest kind. And now, my dear young man, above all, you must not hold exaggerated ideas of what business is. I once read a book by a certain

Gustav Freytag—*Debit and Credit*. That's all very fine. But if you expect anything like that, you'd better stop at home. A merchant's status is one of humility; a man who's not modest will succeed in nothing. And now, my young friend, tell me what you imagine you'll be set to do first with us?"

Bruno struggled bravely with his depression, and said he supposed that at first he would have the care of one of the less important books.

"Indeed?" said Hollander, with a short laugh, and tapped his chin with his stick-handle. "Less important books? Very nice! Less important books? That's a good beginning. But in a well-conducted business there are no less important books. My dear boy, you'd better know at once that you'll begin just as I began myself. At seven every morning you'll open the counting-house, and then sweep the floor. If that doesn't suit you, we won't begin at all. Then you'll dust. To keep the stationery cupboard in order and to learn to copy'll be the next step, and so on. The Germans begin in a modest way. Fine ways, with the English dinner hour, etc., we'll leave to the gentlemen in London. Did you think it would be like this?"

Bruno bowed, and with beating heart promised to take the greatest pains.

"Very good," said Hollander. "We shall see. You'll lodge and board with me, and early to-morrow morning I'll send the carriage for you and your luggage. So that's all settled!"

He shook Bruno's hand heartily, and then went up to Frau Klüth.

"It's a misfortune," he said. "Your husband was a fine fellow ; he served me well for many a long year, when I myself was nobody. Well, we shall see ; I can perhaps make something of your boy. Come, Dina."

The two ladies took their leave, shaking hands all round.

When Dina held little Lina's fingers in hers, she turned, delighted, to the rococo aunt, and said in a half whisper, "How pretty!"

Then they bowed, and got into the carriage, the door of which Siebenbrod attentively and respectfully held open.

"Home!" ordered Hollander, while he took his place. And looking at Bruno, who stood under the window, he gave him another searching glance, and murmured, "Well, well, we shall see!"

CHAPTER VIII

BRUNO AND LINA

TREMENDOUS excitement reigned in the family. The Consul had hardly left the house when the mother betook herself to the attic and with beating heart began to pack Bruno's things. Siebenbrod lent a hand, to prove his fatherly feelings.

Meanwhile the wind had dropped. The village lay steeped in the warm evening sun, and the fresh, clear atmosphere made the distances appear near and distinct.

Bruno was too excited to remain any longer in the broad, low-ceiled room; he felt a fear that he could not explain. If only the Consul had not made that speech about his future duties!

A strange foreboding of the future crept over him. He felt as if he was unprepared, only half ready, to enter the world that he was to conquer. He was possessed by uncertain, far-off glimmerings. And he had the fantastic impression that he heard dance music, the chink of gold, and girls' laughter from the town, only the towers of which he could see. It was horrible. But he heard it unceasingly. Half in despair, he put on his smart hat, which had already been bought in the town, and ran out. Ah! here was light and fresh air and the setting sun.

What did it matter to him that the two children, Lina and Hann, had come out of the door at the same time as he? When they called after him, he only ran the faster. No, no, he must first get rid of these foolish, torturing things that he could only have read of in crude books.

"Bruno, let us go with you!"

He did not hear.

So the two children crept after him, keeping a good look-out, both possessed by the same ambition, to spend this last evening with the grown-up brother.

Opposite the brightly lit tavern, whence might be heard the singing of the students, Bruno crossed a tumbledown bridge which led to the neighbouring village. And he went on, ever looking towards the distant towers of the old Hansa town, which seemed to grow and spread in the evening light. And so he reached the forest, the dark grove of the gods, which since most ancient times formed one of the sights of the district. It contained the ruined cloisters of a Cistercian monastery, and was Bruno's favourite spot. There, half a man's height, rose from the red, ruinous wall, a large, weatherbeaten tomb. God alone knew what unworldly abbot lay buried there. The inscription had long disappeared; only the word "Mors" in big letters remained.

Bruno sat down there. He was alone for some time, then he heard footsteps in the wood, and to his surprise saw the two children standing by him.

"What do you want?" he asked, with a smile; for Bruno could never be cruel and hard, like his elder brother.

Hann answered naively, "To stay with you."

Then he let them sit down by him on the stone. And in silence, almost without a movement, the three sat there close together.

Above them, in one of the windows of the ruins, a family of wrens had made their nest. They whizzed swiftly and almost noiselessly in their flight down the nave, vanished amid the dark foliage, and came whizzing back.

A buzzing and humming sounded from the rushes that grew in the marshy ground by the sea. Otherwise all was as silent as the three on the stone. The forest did not stir. It thought and dreamed as they did.

.
But there was one among them already destined for a calling which would tear him roughly and cruelly from the golden, unfathomable dreams of youth.

From the side where the ruined building touched the road, a tall angular form pressed through the young oaks.

"Hann!" scolded Siebenbrod, who had had some trouble to find the children, and was irritated at having lost at least an hour in the process. "Boy! What's up now? What do you mean by sitting here, gazing into space? Don't you know that we've got to sail the boat? Are you quite stupid, you little wretch? Get up! This won't do at all."

He seized his hand, and without deigning so much as a glance at the others, or allowing Hann to say good-bye, he dragged his pupil away with him.

It was quiet again in the dim cloister. The two left behind noticed a little vessel leave the inlet and put farther and farther out to sea.

The brown sails swelled, and at the rudder a head might be dimly seen, which seemed to look longingly back at the grove and the red ruins. Then the brown speck became smaller and vanished.

It was misty in the forest, and Lina shivered. She sat there in her white frock, with which, in Hann's eyes, the red bow made so wonderful a contrast.

"I wonder if he'll be going home soon," thought the girl, on whom the new apprentice, with his supple figure and well-fitting and fashionable suit, made the impression of a fine gentleman. Involuntarily the girl put her hand on his fingers. The freezing skin woke Bruno from his brown study.

"What are you doing here, little one?" he asked kindly, gently stroking her hair. He looked at her. His relation to his pretty foster-sister had always been that of a grown youth to some insignificant plaything.

"Oh, nothing," she replied, rather curtly; "don't bother about me." Then she put her fingers to her lips and lightly snapped them one against the other. The gesture was pretty and impertinent. It pleased

Bruno so much that he suddenly burst out laughing, and asked her to do it again.

She shook her head, puzzled. "Why?" she asked, annoyed. "I am no longer a child; you mustn't think that."

"Indeed?—really? Tell me, how old are you, then?"

"Don't you know?"

Her voice assumed a more injured tone, and that only seemed to increase Bruno's cheerful mood.

"Don't you know?" she repeated passionately, while she sprawled over the stone.

"No; don't be angry, little one, but I've not paid any attention to the matter."

"Very well, then, I'll tell you. I'm a thousand years old," Lina burst out, and hit his chest angrily with her fist; "now, you know."

Her body bent together like that of a supple cat, and she leapt off the tomb.

"I'm going home!"

"What rubbish!" cried Bruno, disconcerted. "What do you mean?"

He ran after her. She whirled through the long cloisters like a white shadow. The leaves rustled under her feet.

"Lina—confound it all—stop!"

Then she vanished. Whither? It was as if she were swallowed up by the earth. The story went that persons used formerly to disappear like that among the monks. Much perplexed, Bruno looked all round him.

"Lina!" he called again.

Not a sound. Only the tops of the oaks shook, and the magpies laughed from the ruined wall.

Suddenly he received a blow in the back, so that he stumbled forwards. The twisted root of a tree was at his feet, and caused him to fall on his knees.

"That's all right," sounded Lina's voice mischievously behind him. "You're not clever enough."

"The devil indeed! Where do you come from?"

"Oh, I only wanted to show you that I can do a lot of things that you don't know about."

She feasted her eyes on the kneeling youth a moment, and showed her white teeth. Suddenly she shrieked. The youth had got quickly to his feet, and gripped her hands firmly in his.

"Now," he demanded, fetching his breath, "apologise."

"No," retorted Lina.

"Now, be good," suggested Bruno. "You must cure yourself of these wild moods. You must be calm, you little torment."

She struggled, but he would not let her go. Her exertions drove the blood to her face, and her supple body bent like a flexible twig. But after a bit her strength forsook her, and gradually two big tears forced themselves into her eyes.

"Am I hurting you?" asked Bruno anxiously.

Lina tried to hide the pain she was suffering.

But he hastily took his hands away and let her

go. She could have escaped then, but, remarkable to relate, she stayed, and walked quietly by his side.

They reached the low, broken stone wall that divided the ruins from the road which wound along in the sunset like a golden snake; by its side the forest thrust its dark masses farther into the land, and behind it, from the fields steeped in the rising evening mist, could be heard the indistinct sounds of the little branch railway.

Bruno stopped. He felt as if he was looking at all this to-day for the last time for a long while.

Humming softly to himself, he sat down on the wall and stared at the broad, misty plain, so that it was some time before he noticed how the girl tarried in uncertainty by him, because she hesitated to sit down on the dirty wall in her best white frock. Then he simply drew her to him. "Come."

And without any fuss, childishly and naturally, she sat on his knee. He put his arm round her, and she settled herself comfortably.

After a certain interval, the youth said, "This is very nice."

And Lina nodded gravely, and agreed, "Yes, it is."

The setting sun lay still and warm and red over them, and autumnal leaves rustled down from the trees upon their heads.

Then Lina turned to him. When she looked at him, she saw with surprise that a dark moustache was

beginning to ornament the upper lip of her foster-brother's handsome brown face; this was new to her. And so much astonishment appeared in her eyes and slowly opening mouth, that Bruno, who felt there was something flattering to him in her expression, with a sudden laugh hastily pressed the little creature to him.

She did not struggle. She clung closely to him; she nestled against his breast, so that he felt clearly how soft and firm her limbs were. A schoolboy-like, shy desire arose in him to touch her mouth, the red lips glowed so near him. But no, he dared not venture. It was the first time that he had caressed a girl, and well—to think it should be this girl.

No! he was ashamed, afraid, and smiled just a little indignantly at himself.

A strangely pleasant thrill went through him as she nestled more and more cosily into his arms. Although she could not have told why, she crept ever closer, stole glances up at his little moustache, and felt as happy as a kitten just before falling asleep.

For one joyous moment the pair rocked to and fro. Then the train, with its three black, screeching carriages, whizzed by, and a shrill, penetrating whistle startled them.

They looked at each other, and felt compelled to laugh, though neither knew why. It was the laugh of two young beings who discover a mutual attraction. But they did not know it.

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Slowly darkness crept over the road; right and left it began to envelop the last gleams of the sun. The shadows rose over the walls and trees, and hid the red glow that still rested on their tops.

The train went along the riverside on its way to the town, as if entering a dark tunnel. The solitary couple could only see for a time the glimmer of the red eyes at its back.

Then Lina got off Bruno's knee and stretched her arm towards the red, blinking eyes. "To-morrow evening," she began, almost complainingly, "you'll be in it."

"Yes, to-morrow night I shall sleep in the town," he replied quickly.

He took a swift breath.

"What are you going to do in the town?" she went on.

He looked round to see if any one could hear him. Then the secret that lay deepest and most hidden, the dream that had slumbered deep down in his heart, came shyly and shamedly to light.

"I mean to get rich, Lina."

"Rich?"

"Very rich—immeasurably rich."

"Why will you do that?"

He had drawn her to him again. But she did not sit down on his knee. Standing, his trembling arm round her, while her ear almost touched his mouth, she heard and drank in all that he described to her with feverish haste and exuberant, extravagant,

boyish fantasy. There was a strange tremor in his whispering voice.

It must have been simmering and working in him for years. What did she not hear? Gold was the key to all power and glory. Shining gold pieces hung like stars over the heaven of every man on earth. Sometimes they rained down from above in heavy showers. Then there grew up in the ground below, castles, palaces, gardens with rare flowers, clothes, liveries, swift horses, and the rarest treasures. Of course the secret was only revealed to a few chosen ones. Hollander was one of them. He knew it. And he must learn it from the old man. Otherwise he should not return, quite surely not; he should throw himself into the sea if he did not succeed. There would be no good in living then. But he would succeed, he had dreamed of it nearly every night; often he had heard quite clearly a strange ringing and babbling by his bedside. Quite clearly—"chink—chink."

"That's splendid," whispered Lina, who felt as if fire ran through her veins.

The beautiful clothes and the castles attracted her.

"Yes, but it's difficult," he murmured gloomily.

Slowly the moon came up over the tree-tops.

"And when you are rich?" she asked, holding her breath, "then——?"

"Yes, then——"

Quite intoxicated, maddened by the sound of imaginary treasure, he pressed the girl to him till he

could hear the tumultuous beating of her heart. His boyish eyes shone in the moonlight like a couple of diamonds.

"Can I get rich too?" she suddenly asked, with increasing greed.

"You?"

He smiled.

"Why do you laugh? Why do you shake your head?"

"Not you."

She tore her hand violently from him. Her mouth worked. "Why not?" she cried despairingly.

"Because you haven't learnt enough," he explained soothingly, and got up to go with her. "But that doesn't matter, dearest, when a girl's as pretty as you. Come."

Hardly knowing what she did, she let him guide her. Everything, the words of love, the chink of the coins, sounded in her awakening heart. And, almost begging, she sought to persuade the youth that as a matter of fact she had not learnt so little. But then she confessed that the village school had not seen her for months—yes, and that did not strike the stupid old schoolmaster, Toll, as anything peculiar.

Little rascal as she was, she pursed up her lips at the thought of all her naughty tricks. Then, without any warning, she pulled herself up and began to sob loudly.

"Confound it all, Lina, what are you crying about?"

"Oh, nothing."

Therewith she shook her tears from her and held her head up high.

"I can't get rich—I haven't learnt enough," went through her thoughts. And then she looked with secret envy at her companion, who was so soon to walk in these golden groves.

Suddenly, in the darkness, she seized his hand violently, and almost angrily she burst out, "Tell me, will you meet only people who have learnt something at Hollander's?"

He replied in the affirmative. Laughing at her childish rage, he felt flattered that she apparently respected him as a higher being.

They were now standing in front of the bridge. The river sang and gurgled below, the lighted windows of the tavern blinked from the opposite bank. And there—what was that?

Noisy dance music sounded over the water, and behind the window panes dim shadows could be seen moving.

Clink—clank—plump—plump—trala!

Lina seized the railing of the bridge and stood rooted to the ground. Her eyes were firmly fixed on the small shining windows that sent out such marvellous beams of light into the darkness; she clenched her teeth.

"Don't do that. What do you mean? Come along, little one."

"Bruno?"

"Yes."

"See, the students are dancing in the tavern with the fisher-girls."

He threw a longing glance at the tavern, and reached her his hand.

"Yes, yes—but what's that to do with you? You must go home."

"I should like to go across there."

"Over there?" He held her fast. "But listen, that's no place for children."

"I'm no longer a child—I'll show you."

With a snake-like movement, she freed herself from his hand.

"Now I'm going to run across."

"Lina," he remonstrated anxiously, "think what you're doing! We're in mourning."

"Oh, for one who hasn't learnt anything what does that matter? No, no, that doesn't matter. I only want to see."

"In Heaven's name, I implore you, don't do it—for my sake—won't you?"

His voice trembled, and sounded so beseeching, that she stopped and hesitated. The moon glided up over the high parapet of the bridge, so that they could both see clearly. Then a door of the tavern opened. A stream of music and laughter welled forth.

Clink—clank—plump—plump—trala!

That decided her.

Lina trembled from head to foot. "Only just to see!" she shouted again, in a repressed tone. "You can wait for me."

The next moment she flew over the bridge, and as if held back by an invisible hand, Bruno gazed after her. His sharp eyes followed the fugitive, until she

shot through the tavern garden like an arrow. Then he looked round him in bewilderment. On the right was the boundless dark mass of the ocean, on the left the silver river glittered in the moonlight, and farther away a broad shining reflection glimmered in the sky. Under it lay the distant town, in which on the morrow he was to live and work.

"Lina!" he shouted loudly and anxiously, his fear inexplicably growing.

But no one answered him. Only he thought he saw the girl's white figure within the house flitting between the shining windows.

Then all considerations gave way. He forgot everything—his mourning, the seriousness of life that lay behind him and awaited him in the future. He only wanted to fetch her—to watch over the inexperienced child who had nestled on his knees! He still felt her presence. "Yes, he must fetch her."

A few easy leaps, and he was on the other side of the bridge. Quite near him, through the closed doors, came the sound of the music—behind him lay the still, silent town, in which he was to settle down on the following day.

He sprang into the room.

Outside everything was sunk in the darkness of night—the banks and the road and the rustling rushes in the marsh. Below, where the stream gurgled round the bridge, Malljohann, who was crouching thoughtfully on the roof of his cabin and murmuring to the moon, saw a tiny little man lift himself

carefully out of the water, clap his hands, and burst into a shrill laugh. That was no human creature. Malljohann knew well that only the hobgoblin who was said to be Lina's father, and who now rejoiced over the lively little wench, laughed like that.

CHAPTER IX

LINA'S FIRST BALL

THE moon danced on the water. She shone through the dark, smooth mirror, winked, and sent forth golden sparks to Hann.

It was just when Lina with burning cheeks crept through the room for the first time.

Siebenbrod had fallen asleep, and was snoring. Not a breath of air was stirring, the boat rode immovable in the midst of the dead calm. The big nets had been taken in, and a couple of others spread out; a heap of floundering herrings almost a foot in height glimmered in the middle of the boat. They quivered and jumped and shone with a pale, bluish-white light.

A solitary bell sounded in the distance. Then the uncanny, dead silence crept over the still waters once more. The boy, unaccustomed to night-work, crouched by the bow-sprit forward, and struggled against sleep. Sometimes his head drooped heavily against the railing, but he lifted it giddily again to give a last, almost unseeing glance at his stepfather, who, whilst still holding the steering ropes, seemed to have sunk into a shapeless mass. The boatman had ordered him to keep awake, and fear was stronger than fatigue.

Presently he began to tremble. An icy frost came up out of the dark waters and wrapped him closely round as in a cloak. Filled with fear, and seeking something living to cling to, he looked round him. Yonder was the moon. She appeared to be dipping in the water and swimming round the boat.

What was the moon actually? The boy rubbed his head, but the right answer did not come. He put his hand into the shining water, but it was so icy cold that he started in terror.

The face of the moon grinned ever more madly out of the flood. The lonely boy clearly saw the eyes open and shut. Then the mouth opened and showed shining teeth. God! God! What was the moon actually? The face grew ever clearer and rounder. Now it lifted itself out of the water, now it dipped under it, and the next moment the mouth opened and began to speak. "O Christ!" Cold perspiration ran down Hann's face. He was not used to the night and this frightful silence.

"Siebenbrod—Siebenbrod!" he shouted.

A groan sounded from the stern, then all was silent again.

He must know what the moon was. Ignorance oppressed him, as it had Lina a little while before. In wild terror, he tried to go on looking, but scarcely had he determined to do so when the head swelled to gigantic size, there was a sound of hissing, and then it grinned mischievously beneath the trembling waters.

A thought came to Hann. He would say his

evening prayer, for his fear was great. So he folded his hands—

“I am small,
My heart is pure,
No one in it shall dwell
But God alone.”

He still prayed this prayer, although he had become a big boy. He did not feel the absurdity.

When he had uttered the words, he squinted afresh at his foe, who had drawn his face into a thousand golden wrinkles, and lay there, terrible and trembling.

And ever and always there went through the boy's stupid head: “What was the moon actually?”

He had not learnt this at school. Did Lina know? When he got home to-night he would knock at the wall by him behind which she slept, and ask her. Lina was lucky. She lay warm and comfortable in bed. He nodded contentedly. It was quite right that she should not be with him out on the dark ocean. She was not to work. She was much too delicate.

And when he again looked at the glittering image, it seemed to him as if it had changed, as if a little doll was dancing about in it. Truly, that was just how Lina threw her legs about. Joyfully he leaned over, so that the boat rocked. All fear was gone. Instead of the ghostly head, he saw a golden room, in which Lina danced.

“Yes, yes,” he laughed, well pleased; and at the back, in the stern, where the boatman crouched in a shapeless mass, there was a sound of a throat being

cleared, and Siebenbrod's crackling voice asked good-temperedly—

“What o'clock is it?”

The boat put in to Moorluke at midnight. A quarter of an hour later the two fishermen knocked up against Frau Klüth, who was standing in the darkness in front of the house, wringing her hands. When Siebenbrod inquired the cause, he learned that Bruno and Lina had not yet come home. Paul, the student, in spite of the darkness and mist, had already rushed off to the ruins where they had been seen last.

“And it's haunted there,” whimpered Frau Klüth.

“Oh, they'll find their way back all right,” said Siebenbrod consolingly, giving a mighty yawn. “The chief thing now is to go to bed. Ugh! I'm shivering from head to foot. It's vilely cold.” And taking the widow's hand, he murmured, “Go back to bed, Frau Klüth. They're old enough to take care of themselves.”

After some remonstrance, the little woman let herself be led into the house.

But Hann stood in front of the door, and shivered with the cold. Scarcely able to see, with heavy eyelids he gazed out into the night. Had he dreamed? Was the moon still haunting him? Lina was gone.

He shook his head sadly, as if the extraordinary fact was not clear to him; then he shuddered again, and all his limbs trembled with the cold.

Lina was gone. Suddenly a curious rage seized

him; fatigue slipped from his young body, he beat his hands in fury against the wall of the house, ever harder, quicker, as if the stones had not sufficiently guarded the little girl.

Why hadn't she come back? Where was she? Supposing the two of them, Bruno and the girl, had stayed in the cloisters? He howled aloud, and struck the stones again. Blood spirted from his hand.

Then something pattered along the village street. Close by the wall came a fisherwoman in wooden shoes. She was the wife of deaf-and-dumb Claus Muchow, and was going to fetch her husband home from the tavern. When the boy came up to her in the darkness, she was frightened.

"Well, I never!"

"Lina—Lina's gone," he stammered.

The woman thought. "No," she informed him, "I saw her among the students at the tavern."

"At the tavern?" echoed Hann, who could not believe it, and kept his mouth open.

Why did his heart beat so violently against his ribs? His brain was too dull to answer him that.

"Well, I must say she dances beautifully," said the woman, and laughed. Then she suggested that Hann should accompany her, she would take him in with her.

"May I go there?" stuttered Hann.

The woman glanced at him doubtfully. "Yes, why not?" she decided, "if I'm with you. Come along, my boy."

"Well, then, I'll come," broke from the half-dazed

boy, shaking himself in order to get warm. "Then I'll fetch Lina."

"Yes, do."

"Because of our mourning," apologised Hann, filled with shame.

"Yes, yes, of course."

And then the pair vanished.

"Lina, come home," urged Bruno. He held her for a moment by the hand, but she got free from him.

"Presently—presently, Bruno."

"No, come at once."

She laughed wildly. "I'm not doing any harm."

Her cheeks were crimson, the breath came in short quick gasps from her open mouth, and in her eyes flamed a hundred little shining fires. Her feet moved impatiently, and when the music began again, her body swayed and bent as lightly, as free and unconstrained, as if her little white frock had slipped off long ago, as if she stood free from impeding garments, and would soon begin some wonderful dance.

"Lina—Lina!"

"Let me alone, Bruno; I'm not doing any harm."

"You danced with that tall student."

"It's not true. Let me go—please, please."

"No, you shan't do it again."

"Then dance with me yourself."

He was terrified at her wish, and gazed at her, so much childish passion was in her voice. Behind him a few musicians who had come from the town

drummed and fiddled, and mingled with the sound was the scraping noise of shuffling feet.

"Hop! Hop! Hop, hop, hop!" suddenly sang old Kusemann, who in his very best uniform filled the place of master of the ceremonies at all the balls. "Hop, hop, hop!" he sang, boldly lifting his right leg high into the air. "Come, little wench, dance with me! I've wings to my heels—just look!" He sprang into the air. "I'll give you just such another pair if you're nice and give me a kiss—come, my darling." He took her in his arms and swung her round in the air. Her skirts twisted, her dark plaits waved madly about her, from one of her legs the stocking fell down and disclosed the brown, smooth skin.

"Fie!" cried the fisher-girls, ashamed. They had never seen such a dance. Claus Muchow, the deaf and dumb giant, laughed so that the walls shook, while the students swung their beer-mugs in order to give Lina a thundering hurrah!

"Lina—hurrah!" shouted the young voices.

"Lina—hurrah!" sounded from every corner.

"Lina—hurrah!" groaned out old Kusemann, and pouted his lips at his partner, who had not yet touched the ground.

"I've had enough!" moaned the child, before whose eyes everything was swimming, and she began to struggle with the pilot. "Put me down." She sought to touch the floor with the tips of her toes.

Oh! and Bruno, from the musicians' platform, where he held on convulsively to a chair, could see all this—

see the bare leg and the moving toes—see, with raging heart, that the deaf and dumb giant was making pantomimic signs to the tipsy schoolmaster Toll that he would like to carry the girl on his arm, and then on his head. He kept time to the music with his great legs, grinned slyly, and turned round comically in the circle.

“What a wretch!” murmured Bruno, in suppressed fury. “What a wretch!”

Suddenly the figure of the old dead pilot, his father, who had only been resting in his grave a few weeks, and who had considered Lina as his own child, seemed to stand before him.

“How is it possible?” flashed through his mind—“how is it possible? Didn’t I really know the child?”

A strange feeling, of mingled horror and desire, raged in him. He could not take his eyes off the girl. Now old Kusemann dragged her along, gliding in circles towards where he stood. How he trembled!—what shame he felt!—and yet only a few hours since he had held her gently on his knees——

“Little wench,” he heard the pilot whisper, “put your arm round my neck, or you’ll fall.”

And her reply was, “You ugly old fellow!”

“Well, Lina, that has nothing to do with it. Eh! Why are you fidgetting, child? I only wanted to say: Hann’s at sea now.”

Lina struck her hand through the air. “It’s all the same to me where Hann is.”

“Well, you’re getting on, you rascal,” the pilot

began approvingly, when he suddenly felt the child slipping away from him; he lost his balance, and tumbled, turning a somersault, amid the laughter of the students, into his wife's lap. Her face bore a severe expression, and she secretly pinched his arm.

"Alvina," whispered old Kusemann, "be quiet—I know what you think. But the little wretch wouldn't leave me in peace. No good'll come of her, you'll see, Alvina. I know my people."

She asked for something to drink, when, breathing hard and burning hot, she stood near her foster-brother on the platform. But he refused her everything. A vast contempt for the mad creature had come over the refined, cultured boy. He had drawn her into a corner behind the musicians almost with violence, and now spoke his mind to her. How badly she had behaved, how she had disgraced him, what would their mother say? In conclusion came the phrase: "You've learnt nothing—you belong to the fisher-folk."

She made no answer. Her black eyes, which looked so strange in their bluish-white setting, spied about eagerly on all sides. The music and dancing had evidently dazed her. She did nothing but gaze at the twirling couples.

"Lina, don't you understand? I shall carry you out by force, if you don't come of yourself," he whispered, his anger increasing in fury.

She smiled up at him, uncomprehendingly—childishly and yet with a curious conscious expression about the mouth. Then coaxingly she stroked his

cheeks, and bent her head immediately after to look down at her bare leg with genuine astonishment. She now noticed it for the first time.

Bruno felt compelled to follow her glance. The blood mounted to his face—he despised himself because he could not immediately turn away. He waited and looked down. Lina laughed about the accident, and bent over her stocking. At that moment a tall young student named Jahn came up, the same who had previously led the toast to this young dancer, and simply stretched out his arms to her.

His fingers touched Lina's shoulders. Bruno could no longer control himself. He caught her, so that he lifted her up to him, and the violent action made them both fly down the few steps, and then—— Did he begin, or Lina? Neither ever knew.

But she did not loosen the slender arms with which she involuntarily embraced him, and it seemed to Bruno as if everything was whirling round him. The warmth, the hot glow, this first frenzy of life in the young creature so close to his heart infected him! He danced! No, he tore her madly with him. He saw nothing but her sparkling eyes and the white teeth which gleamed behind the thin lips. Round and round, on and on, although he seemed to be dancing over sharp knives, although a fleeting apparition came to him of his brother Hann standing outside by the window and staring in with a stupid expression. Faster, wilder; his partner's unchanging, happy smile intoxicated him, and egged him on.

"Oh!" murmured Lina,— "go on, go on."

"Yes, yes."

"No one dances like you, Bruno."

"Nor like you—like you, Lina."

"Yes, I've learnt that," she whispered proudly, pinching his arm.

But before he could reply something happened which brought him to his senses, before which he fled as if he had committed a crime. It was like an apparition never seen before.

Lina screamed, not loudly, but in terror. Whose was the big wet hand which was placed on her arm? Why did her partner suddenly rush away, as if he thought himself pursued? Who was it who held her fast and spoke to her?

She had to push the hair off her forehead before she recognised him. Then she looked confusedly round the room. Her heart began to beat violently, and an overwhelming terror seized her.

How had she come here? All these strange people? The fisher-girls who were pointing their fingers at her, and the students who were so familiar with her?

Trembling and crushed, she stood before the sailor boy in the wet coat. He looked sorrowfully at her with his dull blue eyes, and said, with scarcely any air of reproach, "I've come for you, Lina."

"Hann!" she stuttered out.

Then he held her faster by the arm, and gravely announced, "I'm to take you home."

"Yes, yes," she uttered shyly, while she pressed closer to him. "Come at once; I'll go with you."

He left her no time for reflection, and before she

knew, he had guided her out of the smoky room, and was leading her through the pitch dark night.

"Oh, Lina," he murmured in deep grief, "what have you done?"

She took a hasty breath. "I don't know," broke from her dully; and then, half afraid, she added, "But I think it all happened because I'd learnt so little."

"Yes, yes, it's all to do with the learning," agreed Hann sadly.

He thought of his learned brother who was to go out into the world to-morrow, and who had danced with the little girl—danced, while the old pilot was hardly cold in his grave. It was horrible.

But he said nothing. Something uncertain, terrifying, kept him away from his sister.

At last they had crept alongside the murmuring water to the door of the house.

"Hann," began Lina, whom the silence hurt, "is mother still up?"

He shook his head.

"Are only you up?"

He nodded.

"Oh, Hann,"—pressing more closely to him in her coaxing way,—“say something to me. I'll never do it again,—do you hear?—but speak to me.”

Again he shook his head. He was so wretched that no words came to him. Then the piercing despair in Lina's heart mastered her; she sprang violently up to the boy, and pressed a hot, imploring kiss on his broad mouth. "I'll never do it again," she whispered, "indeed, indeed, never again—but don't

tell them anything about it here at home, will you? —not a word."

She stood before him for a moment. He thought he could distinguish the whites of her eyes in the darkness. Then he heard something glide up the stairs, and the night wind rustled over the place where she had stood.

It was pitch dark, and Hann was in the road alone. Slowly the boy's head sank into his hands, and he began to sob quietly.

CHAPTER X

BRUNO LEAVES HOME

AT the same time Lina sat on her bed in her nightgown. She let her naked feet hang down, and kept her hands, convulsively clasped together, on her lap, and fixed her eyes steadily on the wooden partition of the attic, as if there was a bright spot in the darkness there, and she expected to see something remarkable. She neither shivered nor trembled, but sat straight up, as still as a mouse, and her thoughts seemed like arrows aimed at a single mark.

At last she gave a deep sigh, and lighted the end of candle which stood on a chair. She sheltered the little flame carefully with her hand, so that her fingers looked as if dipped in blood, and crept noiselessly on her naked feet to the corner behind the bed in which stood an old sugar-chest.

Lina rummaged violently in the receptacle. She soon fetched out a few old books and some copy-books filled with writing, then she industriously turned over the leaves of a torn school atlas, murmuring and spelling in great excitement. Finally she tied a string round them, striking the packet with her hand, as if she had made a great resolve.

She kept the atlas with her, closely pressed

against her body. And when she slipped into bed, she put the torn leaves carefully under her pillow.

She put out the light and lay still, stretched out at full length, her eyes wide open; only her regular breathing betrayed that she lived.

“What a disgusting fog!” coughed Siebenbrod spitting freely. “The devil!”

“Yes, it’s just as if Satan’s grandmother was pouring burnt milk on the earth,” grumbled old Kusemann, whose figure was at times just visible through the thick atmosphere. Occasionally you might have thought you saw the heads of Malljohann and Frau Dolly Petersen bobbing round a pair of horses’ noses, but it all vanished directly behind the damp, heavy curtain.

The sound of a bell was heard from above, and a trembling went through the fog. Eight o’clock! The Consul’s carriage horses neighed loudly and shrilly.

“Now, mother, you must leave off,” advised Siebenbrod. “You must let go Bruno’s and Paul’s hands.”

But the quiet little woman could not yet decide to part from them. She kept on grasping the fingers of her two eldest children, who sat side by side in the light basket carriage, and only the milky fog prevented everybody seeing the shower of heavy tears that ran down the widow’s cheeks.

“Motherkin,” urged Siebenbrod, “the horses are freezing.”

"Where is Hann?" asked the student in his cold voice.

"And Lina?" eagerly added old Kusemann in an ironical tone.

Something rustled close under the parapet at the side of the carriage. So far Hann had been sitting in the fast moored boat, a prey to melancholy thoughts. He would much have preferred to have remained hidden behind the thick wall of fog, instead of shaking Bruno's hand, with whom since yesterday he had felt deeply hurt. But when the student called, he came obediently forward.

"Good-bye, Hann," said the student, passing his hand quickly over the boy's hair. "Look after father's grave—promise me that."

"Yes, yes, Paul," sobbed Hann.

"Good-bye, Hann," said the other. "Keep well, and come and see me soon—do you hear?" He stretched out his hands with hesitation.

The sailor boy pressed them with all his might. In his emotion he forgot his anger. "I hope you'll get on famously, Bruno—famously."

"And you too."

"But where's Lina?" shouted old Kusemann, who missed his little partner.

No one knew.

Only Malljohann, who sometimes saw things that no one else did, stood in his usual slouching way and made wonderful grimaces at the little round attic window. And the more the others shouted, and the louder their expressions of wonder, the more clearly did Malljohann recognise the childish

head at the window calmly looking down through the fog.

"Gee-up!" called the coachman.

The whip cracked, the horses started, and the wheels clattered noisily over the damp ground.

"Good-bye, children, my dears," called the mother, raising her voice.

In a second the white mist had swallowed up the equipage. But the sound of the wheels was still audible, and Lina thrust her slender body as far as possible out of the little round window after the vanishing noise, so that she almost seemed to lean on the mist as on a cushion. She stretched her hand out in front of her, bending her fingers, as if trying to seize something she had lost.

Then they all went about their usual day's work. Malljohann played the concertina; old Kusemann betook himself to his observatory; Siebenbrod mended a sail in the kitchen; Hann with his heavy head and melancholy thoughts sat in his anchored boat, where he had fastened a small plank to one side of the skiff.

The fog threw its thick waves over everything. And so no one saw Lina cautiously slip out of the house with the bundle she had tied up in the night.

She went straight to the pastor's house, which was situated near the churchyard. The active little pastor, who was busy with his fat wife in the red-tiled entry, sampling a small cask of Malaga, gaily pulled her hair and asked her what she wanted; she held out the packet of books to him with a

wild gesture and a beating heart. "I want to learn."

"H'm," murmured the pastor, and looked, greatly disconcerted, from the girl to the cheese that he had just taken in his hand to taste. "Oh, that's it, is it? Yes, yes—h'm—h'm."

And then he offered her a glass of the golden-brown, sparkling Malaga.

BOOK II

“MADAM WORLD”

CHAPTER I

CHRONOS

I DOUBT whether you know that the gods still inhabit the world. But you may believe it—it is so. I myself knew a very interesting god. I do not know if he still lives. But I will take my oath I met him between Greifswald and Moorluke.

It was on New Year's Eve, 1896. I had just alighted from the train, and was making my way across the fields, now thickly covered with snow, in the twilight, to Moorluke. Darkness came on; the driving snow whirled round me, the wind howled over the plain, and the ice under my feet groaned and cracked as if bad dreams were disturbing the earth's winter sleep—and, did I deceive myself?—no, out of the darkness there rattled a long, springless cart, a horse neighed, an extraordinary red light appeared, and two powerful white horses were on the point of dragging the waggon over me. I called out, "Hi! Stop!"

Something stirred on the high box-seat. A figure huddled in a white sheepskin, holding in its hand a shaded light, which it thrust in my face.

"Have you been driving for long?" I asked, just to make a beginning.

"A long time," answered a dry, husky voice.

"Where?"

"Straight ahead."

That sounded strange, and almost without reflection I asked if I could go with him to Moorluke.

Without a word, the sheepskin moved to one side, and when I had taken my place I threw a glance behind to see what the old man's load was.

"Dung."

A strange feeling overcame me, as just at that moment I caught sight of the driver's countenance. The man was extremely old, and suddenly I remembered to have heard my friend Professor Asmus, in Greifswald, say that an old dung-cart driver plied between Moorluke and the town, who was in fact a fallen god and was called Chronos. So I took courage and asked if he knew my friends in Moorluke—Hann and Lina, old Kusemann, and the rest?

After some grumbling, and a few trite reflections on the flying years, he said—

"Oh, as to Lina and Hann, things have gone oddly with them. The wench had a great desire to learn, and so she asked Pastor Witt to teach her, and he did—a whole crowd of things. Only in a cursory sort of fashion, you must understand; but now she knows about old Fritz and Luther and such-like people, and that the earth is round, and moves."

"And Hann?"

"Oh, with him it was quite different. When the poor boy saw that the girl ran to the pastor's, and discovered all she heard there, and that she became more refined and almost a young lady, he took it into his

head that Pastor Witt must help him too. And so he neglected his fishing, and sat whole nights in the boat as if in a dream, and Siebenbrod, who has gradually become a grasping miser,—‘save, save,’ are the words ever in his mouth,—dealt him many a blow with the rope’s end. But do you think that did any good? Not a scrap. The boy became quieter and quieter, more self-centred; and one Sunday, when he had been to the service in church and it was over, and cheerful Pastor Witt went into the sacristy, where sacristan Bollentin always had to wait for him with a glass of wine, Hann followed him. He stood in front of him and twisted his cap, and at last said—

“‘Sir, is it true what Lina says, that the earth turns round?’

“‘Yes,’ said Pastor Witt wonderingly; ‘that is so.’

“Then Hann asked further: ‘Sir, what can I do so that I can perceive the movement?’

“At that Pastor Witt burst into a loud laugh, and said to the sacristan, ‘Just look at this boy—he’s a philosopher.’ And with a kindly gesture he stroked Hann’s hair and added, ‘Listen, my boy: I’ll tell you something. You can perceive the movement in three ways. First, in a room where dancing is going on. Secondly, if you’ll come and help me when I draw off my Malaga—eh, Mr. Sacristan?—you perceive it then, don’t you? And best of all, when you’re deeply engrossed in some learned, incomprehensible book. If you don’t feel the “turning” then, you’ve no talent for that sort of thing. But that’ll do; of course I’m only joking.’

“‘But, sir,’ said Hann,—and see, the tears stood in the silly boy’s eyes, and he held the pastor by his gown,—‘can’t I come too, when you show Lina those books?’

“‘Yes, why not?’ said Pastor Witt, and scratched his head in slight embarrassment. ‘But why do you want to do that?’

“‘Oh, sir,’ sobbed Hann, ‘so that Lina shall not be so proud, and so that I can talk to her again like I used to.’ And he shook in all his limbs.

“The little fat pastor was quite taken aback and examined the sobbing boy attentively, and at last said to the sacristan, but very softly, ‘Bollentin, do you know what a romance is? Yes? Well, then, there’s one here.’ And he gave Hann the required permission, and pushed him out of the sacristy.”

I then ventured to ask my driver if Hann had really become a philosopher under Pastor Witt’s tuition.

“Why, what do you suppose? The pastor soon saw that nothing was to be done with Hann with the usual books. For when he was lecturing about the so-called history of the Creation, Hann would have nothing to say to it, only incidentally remarked that the history of the Creation had one fault.”

“And how did the pastor reply?”

“He looked dizzily round the room, peeped at Lina, who sat there red with annoyance, and at last asked, ‘What do you mean?’ And what do you think the stupid fellow came out with? ‘Sir, tell me, won’t you,’ he began,—‘horses work the whole day, and cows give milk and sheep yield wool, and notwithstanding

all they do, the poor creatures have no souls, and yet they're alive ; but man, who slaughters and kills them, he has a soul—now, sir, is that goodness?' Pastor Witt didn't in the least know what to say, and looked in his book, and wetted his finger and quickly turned over the pages, and at length declared in a tone of annoyance that no true Christian thought about such things. But when they came to the story of Adam and Eve and the Fall, Hann couldn't get on with that either, and shook his head in silence, so that the little pastor asked quite impatiently what was the matter now. And Hann collected his thoughts as well as he could, and said, 'Sir, don't be vexed, but the clergy have only imagined the story about Adam's rib and that Eve was formed out of it ; for the man has nothing to do with it—we all come from women.' And the boy, not seeing that the pastor looked in terror at Lina, added, 'And it's just the same with animals. I was lately present when neighbour Pieper's white cow threw a fine calf.'

"'Boy!' here shouted the clergyman, and rose violently from his seat, intending to reprove him. But Hann had not finished, and quickly added, 'And, sir, if they drove Adam and Eve out of Paradise, how is it that we others can't get in again? We've not eaten any apples—I don't care for apples, I much prefer plums. And then, sir, just because of an apple? At Toll's, the schoolmaster's, apples hang over the fence, but he takes no heed when the children pilfer them, and he's only a schoolmaster, and not God.'"

"And what happened then?" I asked.

"Listen. At first the little pastor got very red, and you didn't know if he was angry or amused. Then he got up and walked up and down the room several times, and at last offered his hand to Hann and invited him to go with him. They both stood outside the parsonage, and it was a calm, fresh day, just before the spring comes; snow still lay a foot high round the trees, but the birches in the churchyard were putting forth their first green shoots. And the pastor, affectionately stroking Hann's cheek, said, 'Well, my boy, I can't teach you any longer. You need quite different teachers.' And when Hann, opening his eyes wide, asked what kind, the pastor pointed all around, to the sun and the water, even to Cœur his black poodle, and at length said, 'Yes, I mean those. They can tell you much more than I can, and you'll understand them better. And now let my wife give you some plum jam. And then God be with you, and adieu.'"

And by the time the lights of Moorluke came into sight, I had heard all I wanted to know.

In the seven years Hann had remained a dreamer. What he had not learnt, and what he had thought about for himself, entered into his bones, and made him awkward and dull. Siebenbrod employed him chiefly to take strangers out sailing. He was not much good for anything else.

"But Lina?"

"She's been for two years with a cousin of Hollander's, in the town. I think the old spinster's name is Dewitz. She's a sort of companion to her, and the old lady teaches her, and is making a regular fine lady of her."

"Lina must have grown very pretty?"

"Pretty? How stupid you all are! She's just budding into beauty."

I here interrupted the old fellow, and asked after Bruno.

"He has been working for three years in a branch of the Consul's business at Hamburg. But he's to come back now, with the New Year. He's grown a swell, with a frockcoat and wide trousers and brown kid gloves."

"And Paul?"

Chronos shook himself. He could not bear that sort of person. The student had pretty well starved through the examination years on private lessons. He wouldn't accept anything from any one. Now he was waiting for a post.

CHAPTER II

LINA BECOMES A YOUNG LADY

"THE hyacinths are coming out," announced Lina, as she arranged the glasses with their newly bursting buds in the window, which was thickly coated with ice. "Look, the last one is red too. Now we've only red and white."

It was New Year's morning.

The comfortable room was flooded with the winter sunshine. Everything in the spinster's abode shone with cleanliness. The brown polished floor, the yellow polished wicker arm-chairs, the mahogany table glistened, even the window testified to the fact that Fräulein Dewitz was eccentric enough generally to polish up her beautiful room after the departure of every visitor whose advent might have dimmed its purity. And then the two beds that could be seen shimmering in the alcove. It seemed almost impossible that human hands could have touched that snowy whiteness.

The best of all this bright cleanliness, a sort of shining halo of purity, beamed from the owner herself. There she sat in the wicker chair, its yellow varnish reflecting the sun, with a brightly polished pair of spectacles on her snub nose, and read the New Year's letters of congratulation which lay in a white heap on her lap.

For some time she half whispered to herself. Then the calm was disturbed.

"Do look, Fräulein Dewitz," called Lina again. "Look at the lovely colours. How sweet they smell! The room is full of the scent."

"You are not to say Fräulein Dewitz," said the grey-haired old lady reprovingly, and shook the two big curls that flanked a smooth parting.

"Aunt," said Lina, to improve matters.

"That sounds better. And when we are alone, I like you to say *thou* to me. Perhaps *you* is better before people. For respect must be insisted on with the young folk of to-day. It is very necessary."

"Certainly," agreed Lina, who had only half listened, but never contradicted the old lady. "You're quite right there, aunt."

"Yes, yes," continued the old dame, and moistened her underlip—a habit acquired during her long years of service as a sewing-mistress. "You're the last I shall instruct. Oh, heavens, when I look back—and one does so involuntarily on New Year's Day—over thirty years, and think of all the little girls I've seen sitting in front of me, and that I've taught to sew and knit and embroider—they each had their own skein of wool that they bought of me, and I only charged them just what it cost. Dear God! it's true many of them began very awkwardly; but in the end they were obliged to learn, for at that time it was required not only by their families but by the State. Yes, you see, my daughter, I've often thought it over, for then more importance was attached to making young girls calm and quiet, and for that purpose—I know it for certain—my

vocation was just the right thing. When the fresh young faces bent over their crochet and had to count—one, two, three—one, two, three—then they began to feel like little housewives. It was quite touching to see them. Now everything's different."

The old lady sighed a little, moistened her thick underlip with her tongue, and became immersed in a new letter which she had just opened.

For a while nothing was heard but Fräulein Dewitz's murmuring and the crackling of the wood that burned merrily in the polished white stove.

Then a sort of titter rang through the room, and Lina, who had been at the window all the time, stretched her slender figure.

"Did you laugh?" asked the old lady, looking up in surprise from her letter.

"Of course not," Lina assured her, while she made a little peephole in the frozen pane.

"It sounded just as though you did."

"I only coughed," replied the girl calmly, while she looked through her round hole into the street.

"Yes, yes, you must be careful of draughts," said the aunt warningly. "All sorts of diseases are due to draughts. Many of my older acquaintances invariably carry a few cat's hairs in their pockets as a protection."

The murmuring began again, and the old lady did not see that the supple girl leaned forward, and that short, suppressed laughter stirred the stretched limbs, and that a rare, animated expression spread over her face—a brightness that the teacher had long

felt to be inexplicable in the otherwise obedient girl, and had sought to suppress.

At the same time a sturdy, thickset figure was pacing awkwardly up and down on the opposite side of the street, in a blue sailor's suit, a hideous grey scarf round his neck, his face covered with freckles that did not disappear even in winter, right up to his blue cap. He carried an enormous basket, the cover of which flapped up and down, and from time to time he sent a shy, quick glance over to the well-known, flower-decorated window.

It was Hann Klüth, who, much against the will of miserly Siebenbrod, presented to Fräulein Dewitz every New Year's Day, in this basket, a quantity of sausages and two snow-white live geese. But every time it required greater energy to carry it up the narrow wooden stairs. Everything was so fine at Fräulein Dewitz's, and even when the old lady kindly motioned him to sit in one of the yellow arm-chairs, and Lina asked laughingly if he had fattened the geese himself, or when he was going to kill a pike under the ice again, Hann felt uncomfortable—a sort of inward humiliation which he did not like to confess even to himself.

Why did Lina ask him such questions? And why did she always purse up her lips into such a peculiar smile every time she looked at him? Yes, it was all right. She had become a real young lady with Fräulein Dewitz; she had danced at the captains' ball and at the students' ball, and had learned a great deal; but he, Hann Klüth—well, the others did not know that he, too, had not remained altogether stupid; and

therefore he laughed in melancholy pride, while he paced the snow-covered pavement. They had no idea how much he had ferreted out for himself—not out of books, it is true, but out of himself, during the long days and nights at sea. He had his own views about most of the things that were to be seen and thought about. They might not be correct, but any way they were views of a kind. And thinking—putting two and two together and making four—that was his one delight. Despite Siebenbrod's blows and his mother's tears, with only old Kusemann's help, he had accomplished much. "Oh, don't be angry," stammered Hann, startled out of his dream, and staring in terror at the tall student in his blue cap whom he had knocked up against.

"Confound it, you fellow, take care what you're doing," snapped the young gentleman angrily; he felt sure that Lina must have seen the ridiculous encounter with this boorish peasant, for she lived opposite, and invariably at that hour he walked up and down in front of her window.

"Don't be so angry," said Hann in apology. "I didn't see you."

But the son of the Muses considered that the poor fisherman ought to be made to feel his conduct more deeply.

"What's that to do with me?" he grumbled; while his brown Newfoundland dog began to growl at Hann ominously. "Ought I to have made way for you?"

"Certainly, if you saw me first," replied Hann, with dignity.

"You idiot!" shouted the student, who had not yet advanced far in "natural" philosophy. "If you were not such a sheep's head of an ass——"

"I know that I've not studied," said Hann calmly; and then added thoughtfully, "I thought the public streets were meant for everybody; if not, why are they so wide? And if a fine gentleman fears to knock up against a common man, it would be better for him to keep out of his way."

This was an example of the tortuous thinking to which Hann had accustomed himself, and for which no chair existed as yet at the little University. His adversary threw him a scathing glance, and with the consciousness that he had now discovered in what class to place the basket-carrier, shouted contemptuously "Camel!" and rushed off in triumph.

"Why camel?" said Hann to himself, doubtfully gazing after the young man. "A camel, such as they once showed in the menagerie here, that's an animal used for transport in the Great Desert, and that has, as old Kusemann says, a natural water reservoir. Now why should the name of so useful a creature be used as a term of reproach? I should like to know that. It's the same with 'dog' and——" But he got no farther in his reflections. For the window with the flowers opened, and a clear voice called down in a low tone, "Hann!"

The sailor started. That voice had always something rousing, alarming, in it for him. During the many years in which he had now been parted from Lina he had come to recognise that the abyss between

them was not to be bridged over. She, a town lady who dined at Hollander's the Consul's—and he, Siebenbrod's boatman, who took the students out sailing for a shilling a head. No, the times were past and gone when he had been betrothed to her, when old Kusemann had betrothed them in the evening mist, and when she had kissed Hann, trembling with fear. It was over for ever. Only the remembrance of it—that remained. And he did think of it—but no one knew that he did. In the long winter evenings, when his mother and Siebenbrod and himself sat by the fire in the kitchen, mending the nets, and the pungent fishy smell mingled with that of the peat, then he thought and thought. And if in passing a gull struck the wall with its wings, he believed that slender little Lina rushed through the house; and when he saw the couples dancing on the ice, he thought how Lina could dance. He could not help remembering the dance at the tavern, a few weeks after his father's death. Yes, how prettily her skirts had fluttered——

“Hann!” called the clear voice again. Hann started, and began to feel dreadfully ashamed of himself. For that “accursed thinking habit” which so often overcame him had now seized him in the public street, and so powerfully that he had almost forgotten why he was carrying the basket. But there was no longer any help for it, he must go up. Without an upward glance, he raised his cap to Lina, and ascended the narrow, winding wooden stairs.

“Oh!” said Fräulein Dewitz, after he had set down the basket in front of her with a pretty speech, “Lina,

look. I believe it is a present for us. Whatever can it be?"

Lina did not answer. She stood at the window, with the gentle, restrained smile still on her lips, and looked on while Hann awkwardly dipped into the basket and brought out a goose by the neck.

"Well, I never! A goose!" said Fräulein Dewitz in astonishment, although she had fully reckoned on it in her household arrangements. But the good old dame expected to give pleasure by her surprise. "And what's in the other basket?" she continued, and licked her lips in anticipation. "Oh, but it's not really——"

"Yes, ma'am," interrupted Hann,—"*sausage*."

"No? How attentive!" praised the sewing-mistress, and with a movement of her well-cared-for hand invited Hann to take the wicker chair opposite her.

That was the terrible moment. Hann remained standing, tried once more to make a bow, and began to say that to-day was New Year's Day, and that he offered his hearty congratulations.

"Thank you—thank you most sincerely, my dear Herr Klüth," said the old lady kindly, again signing him to sit down, which only made Hann blush the more.

And all the time Lina stood there and smiled. She had taken hold of the upper bolt of the window with her left hand and leaned her dark head on her arm. She made a pretty, attractive picture. Hann had glanced over at her several times, but only now did he venture to raise his eyes. He was amazed. How slender and refined she looked in the close-fitting blue

cloth dress! How tall she had grown, and how she had developed!

"Aren't you going to congratulate me too?" she asked somewhat patronisingly.

"Yes, Lina, you too," he brought out.

"Then give me your hand," she commanded, the smile still on her face.

Hann made one step forward, and as she came no nearer, he took another, and hesitatingly stretched out his arm to her. "There, Lina."

She seized it with a mischievous exclamation, and shook his hand vehemently. "How's mother?" she asked quickly.

"Oh, she's all right."

"And Siebenbrod?"

"Just before New Year he bought three more pigs. We've had to enlarge the sty."

Again a short mocking sound came from the girl's lips.

But the old lady reproved her. There was nothing to scoff at. Siebenbrod deserved all respect for his economy and his efforts to enrich the household.

"Certainly, aunt," agreed Lina, who had forgotten the old lady for a moment, and then in haste asked Hann how he was getting on himself.

"Oh, so far all right, Lina, only——" He stopped.

"Well, what?"

"I've got to serve now."

"You?" And with a sudden movement she stiffened her arm and turned Hann round, as if she wished to view the future warrior from all sides.

"Well, and aren't you very glad?" threw in the aunt. "It's an honour to serve your country, isn't it?"

But Hann shook his head and looked at the floor in distress. "No, ma'am, I don't feel that."

"Not?" shouted both the women in unison.

Hann was frightened, and cast down his bright eyes. He perceived that here was something that would clash with all the old lady's views. And instead of expressing his thoughts clearly, as he often did to himself something after this fashion: "Soldier? No—why should you have to learn how to shoot other people's sons? And yet, if I in my sailor dress kill a man, I should be executed—but in the blue and red coat I should get a decoration for doing it. That doesn't tally,"—instead of those wise reflections, he only brought shyly out, "No, I don't want to have anything to do with soldiering."

The old lady rose. "Indeed?" she said coldly. "That is curious—h'm——" and with the words, "I must go and look after things in the kitchen," she went out with her long, dignified steps.

The two Moorluke children were alone. Lina slowly ensconced herself in the empty arm-chair, leaned back and knocked the tips of her shoes gently together. Then again she glanced appraisingly at her awkward visitor, and suddenly with a decisive movement invited him to sit opposite her.

Hann ventured to do so. He kept his cap in his hand, and blinked at her respectfully. How delicate and pretty everything about her was! The little low-cut shoes showing the black stockings, and the black

silk apron that sat so smoothly over her hips. And as she gently rocked herself to and fro, her little dark head slightly on one side, while her black eyes now and again glanced over at him, the lad was filled with such joy that he nodded his head more and more contentedly, and rubbed his free hand over his knee in satisfaction.

All at once Lina bent quickly forward, so that Hann nearly got a fright, stuck both her elbows on her knees, as had always been her childish custom, and shortly and haughtily came from her lips—

“Tell me, Hann, are you engaged?”

Hann held his breath and gazed sadly, in boundless astonishment, into her delicate face. How could he be engaged? Didn't she know that he not only never dreamed of such things, but avoided all women, because—yes, because—— He shook his head, a melancholy expression on his lips, and continued rubbing his knee.

“Lina—oh!”

“Well, whatever's the matter with you?”

The poor fellow's embarrassment seemed to afford her great enjoyment, and her small face still supported by her hands, she went on talking softly, whispering so that Fräulein Dewitz in the kitchen should not hear. Oh, it was such a long-denied pleasure—to be able to tease and chatter once again, unobserved and unrestrained.

“But, Hann, there are the schoolmaster's two daughters, and they said lately that you had danced with the eldest, the pretty one, who, they say, is going to be a nursing sister.”

Hann rocked himself to and fro. "Yes, Lina, I did; I couldn't very well help it."

"But she'd be just right for you," she continued. "Think if she was only going to become a nursing sister on your account!" And suddenly she seized both his hands and burst into a long, hearty laugh. The idea of seeing Hann engaged to the schoolmaster's pretty daughter seemed to yield her uncommon delight. Didn't she notice that the poor lad looked down more and more shyly? Didn't she feel that her words pained and distressed him more and more?

At last he got up. He controlled himself, and said in a suppressed voice, "Lina, the old lady's not coming back. It's time I went."

He did not venture to look at her, but stood slowly buttoning his blue sailor's jacket.

Lina got up. She walked round him with light steps, taking his measure, as though she had not had enough of the joke. Suddenly she stopped close against his side, lifted his chin up, and compelled him to look at her. His blue eyes were full of suppressed sorrow.

"I say, Hann," she began, "if it isn't Clara Toll, you like me better? Is that it? Don't you remember we were betrothed, and old Kusemann was to give us a pot full of gold pieces from the sunken town for a wedding gift?"

She stroked his cheek, just as she would have caressed a big faithful dog; but when she met his dignified, sad look, she desisted.

"Never mind, Hann," she said indulgently.

"Yes, Lina," he said, with effort; "we were only children, and very stupid."

"Yes, yes, Hann," she said more calmly; and after a while added, "But I want you to have the pot full of gold pieces. If you could find the sunken town, then——" Her eyes grew bigger, she showed her little pointed teeth. She looked as if she could have loved the possessor of the sunken town with its vast treasures.

"No, Lina," he murmured, shrugging his shoulders; "that about the town is just like all the rest. When I was quite little, and you lived out there with us, I saw it often quite distinctly under the water. Sometimes even at night. And old Kusemann showed me the lighted windows, and such-like things. But later, as one gets older, one sees it less. I think it's only a child's town——"

Therewith he offered her his hand in farewell; but Lina stared at him in wonder over his last words. And more respectfully came from her lips, "Hann, what you said wasn't so stupid."

"Oh, Lina," he excused himself modestly, "I only thought so—and now, good-bye."

He nodded, lifted the baskets, and prepared to go.

Then she quickly seized his hand again, and took a letter off the table which Fräulein Dewitz had left unopened. "Hann," she whispered, "look, do you know who it's from?"

Hann shook his head. How could he guess? The letter was closed.

"Don't you know the writing?"

Hann looked at the delicate handwriting and read

the postmark—the letter came from Hamburg. It might be from his brother Bruno.

Lina nodded eagerly. "Yes, and do you know what's in it? The Consul expects him this morning. Perhaps he's here already."

"Bruno?"

She nodded, smoothed her hair, and glanced in the mahogany-framed mirror that hung in the corner.

"How do you know the contents?" asked Hann in surprise.

Lina started, looked round swiftly at the door, and at last took a deep breath. And while her cheeks grew crimson, she controlled herself, and tried to laugh. "You mustn't tell any one, Hann," she stammered. "I—was so curious—you know—I opened the letter just a tiny bit over the steam from the kettle in the kitchen—only the tiniest bit. It wasn't anything. But you won't tell?"

Hann stood quite overcome before the beautiful sinner. He was so ashamed that he trembled as if he himself had committed the crime.

"Lina," he murmured, "how could you do such a thing?"

"Oh, it was only a joke."

"Yes, but if one stole just for a joke?" he went on, in his philosophising way.

But Lina was already quite consoled. She gave him a blow in fun in the side with her little fist, and while she laughingly pushed him out of the door, she called to him over the stairs in her suppressed, scarcely audible fashion, "You're not wise, you stupid boy. Remember me to all at home. To

Clara Toll too. Come soon again, and bring us something nice to eat. Do you hear?"

"Yes, of course I will, and gladly, Lina," said the sailor, while, half preoccupied, he floundered down the stairs. "And if you'll let me, I'll come quite soon again—but—but——"

And he stopped in front of the house and looked disconsolately up at the window on the panes of which were rows of silvery ice-flowers, and behind which the hyacinths had smelled so sweet.

"Yes, yes," he sighed in a half-dream, "that, too, is nothing but a sunken town of one's childhood. Yes, yes—I'll go home now."

CHAPTER III

BRUNO'S SUCCESS IN BUSINESS

ON that same New Year's morning, Hollander the Consul sat on a hard wooden chair, opposite his Hamburg representative. The room was simply, not to say poorly furnished. He was wrapped in his ample Oriental dressing-gown, underneath which his white braces dangled carelessly. His slippers were down at heels. He wore a black silk cap on his head, and now and again rubbed his unshaven, stubbly cheeks with some irritation, as if he felt specially uncomfortable to-day. And yet he had not the slightest cause for ill-humour. The accounts of the young gentleman with the handsome moustache and the strictly English clothes were in admirable order. And if the expenses of his representative were unusually large—"Good heavens! but it's splendid business," murmured the Consul, while he rubbed his stubble with greater violence, for Bruno brought commissions and orders for the shipyard the like of which the chief had not had in hand for a very long time.

"Just see, the Asiatic Line commissions a screw steamer of six thousand tons, and the Dutch Herring Company ten fishing cutters. Good heavens!"

Tears trickled from the Consul's eyes. He brushed them away with his hand, and looked at the sheet of

paper again. The statements were still there, written out in Bruno's beautiful, upright hand.

"Extraordinary!"

And the owner of the shipyard looked over the paper at his young subordinate, who sat there opposite him so fresh and alert, but he was again seized by such a strong feeling of discomfort that he almost hurt his cheek with the hard rubbing.

"Acceptable prices," he murmured afresh, and spat. Then he threw the papers on to the narrow folding-table, which was fastened to the wall opposite his camp-bed, and with much irritation let fly at his employé. He could no longer control himself.

"Tell me, how do you contrive all this?"

"How I contrive it? I don't understand, sir." A cheerful smile played round Bruno's lips. Hollander frowned.

"I'm quite serious," he said. "How old are you exactly?"

"Twenty-four, sir."

"Incredible! Quite twenty-four? Has the world actually grown so young, or are you indeed the exceptional being whom you believe yourself to be, as I once told you?"

Bruno sat still while the Consul shuffled up and down the room with his braces flying. But the young man's cheeks grew crimson, his eyes shone feverishly; for now, at last—at last—the rough, big man yonder had uttered openly and candidly what had lain between them like a heavy cloud during the whole of Bruno's long apprenticeship. That silent, secret, lurking mistrust, that increased more quickly and

surprisingly as the cleverness and ability of the apprentice developed, the more the other employés admired and wondered at him. But why? Why? Bruno, who eagerly and steadily and inevitably progressed in his work, could never fathom the reason.

His cheeks glowed a deep crimson, and with trembling voice and smiling lips he said, "Sir, you say that to me in the first hour of my return from the post to which you appointed me yourself. I must then assume that I have never possessed your entire approval, and do not now possess it?"

The Consul stopped, turned aside, tugged at his bed, shuffled with his slippers, and at last impatiently giving the pillow a blow, said gruffly, "What approval? What do you want with my approval? You've got your own, so all is right. I must give vent to my feelings. Don't be angry with me, but if you are, I can't help it. Then, once and for all, you're well up, do you understand, in everything that regards success—for example, these two commissions, especially the Dutch one, which my other employés have in vain tried to get; but you? You simply walk in, and have such a way of putting things to people—of dazzling even the most prudent—that——"

Bruno's heart beat. What he now heard of his character frightened him. "Sir," he interrupted stammering, "you don't mean to reproach me with deceiving your clients with false reports?" His right hand clutched the leather portfolio convulsively.

"God forbid! That never occurred to me," continued the shipyard owner, again striking the pillow. "Lies!

No, you wouldn't be so stupid as that. But you possess such a gift of imagination—such a—how shall I express it?—such a power of description that you compel people to see things just as you represent them.”

“And is that so bad?” asked Bruno in surprise. He tried to shrug his shoulders, but without success. His heart was more and more oppressed by anxiety, and a slight shudder ran through him. He could no longer force himself to regard as merely childish all that the sour man was saying.

“Bad?” repeated Hollander irritably, turning round towards the young man, and sinking slowly into the wooden chair. “Well, I can't say. It's only the beginning, perhaps. My dear Klüth, let me make a clean breast of it. I have watched you through your whole apprenticeship. You know that. And I ask you: Have you ever worked hard? No! it wasn't necessary. You acquired everything without trouble,—knowledge of the goods, technical knowledge, commercial law, languages, etc.,—everything in the twinkling of an eye! You were promoted from one post to another, you rose higher and higher—secretly against my will. But I could not advance any good reason against it. And now you come back to me, after the Hamburg business, which has turned out well—extremely well, and if I'm not deceiving myself, you're now expecting to get the agency. You would like to be my representative, whose signature would have a value equal to mine. Isn't it so? You would like to sign ‘Johann Christian Hollander’? Tell me the truth, Klüth, isn't it so?”

Bruno jumped up. He felt that he needed all his coolness. Only a cold, business-like calm could lead to the goal in this case; but the man's insulting manner, the open mistrust that the young man had read in his grey eyes during these long years, made him forget all moderation. And what had he to fear? With what had he to reproach himself? Were not all his thoughts continually employed to the advantage of this eccentric person, and directed on his business?

He jumped up, full of fire, his eyes sparkling, and louder and more boldly than an employé had ever before ventured to answer Hollander, he shouted in a hoarse, angry voice, "Very well, sir; since we are at this point, I am indifferent to the possible consequences. At least, you shall know everything. You have embittered the best years of my development. You alone. Never a word of acknowledgment, this continual spying round as if I had no other thought than to rob your cash-box——"

"Klüt!" interrupted the old man loudly, but his interlocutor paid no attention.

"I can only tell you that if I did not become really bad, negligent, and a cheat,"—here Bruno raised his voice still higher, and in his vehemence stepped nearer to his chief, who sat before him uneasily and with sunken head,—“if I really have not become a cheat, I owe it solely to that easy disposition you despise so much. But you—you have done everything to spoil that disposition. Do you suppose I didn't mind that the whole time I lived in your house you let me sit alone, in my little room, like a troublesome boarder, while most of my colleagues were invited to

both great and small festivities in your family circle? How often did I hear the dance music, sitting lonely there! It cost me burning tears. Now you know it. I shan't forget it, sir."

His voice trembled with excitement, his breast heaved and sank, and the chief could see how the tears rose to his eyes.

The old man grumbled out something that sounded like "Nonsense," but it was evident that he was anxious to hear more. For a space there was silence in the little room. Each measured the other. At length the shipyard owner pricked up his ears, blinked his eyes, and asked sharply, and half mockingly, "Well, and what more?"

"What more? Oh, only the question, Won't you tell me the reason why you withhold from me the post of agent which is my due? Wouldn't it perhaps be better if we put an end to this unfortunate connection?"

The Consul raised his eyebrows. "You want to go?"

"Yes."

"H'm!"

He turned round, went to the window, trailing his braces, and with his back to Bruno stood drumming on the panes. But not for long; for he heard behind him a singular noise—a deep breathing, a gasp, then finally a strong suppressed sobbing. Hollander turned round to his visitor in surprise. Yet if he had not known of old his apprentice's inflammable temperament, which was as easily roused to immoderate bursts of joy as to wild, frenzied grief, he would have

guessed from Bruno's trembling lips what a storm was passing through the young man's soul. Outwardly his demeanour was unchanged, but his brown eyes flamed with inward excitement.

The old man frowned again. Then he went slowly up to Bruno, and, as if his thoughts were far away, took him by the buttonhole and tugged at it energetically, while he spoke the following: "Now, we'll let all this be, Klüth. Calm yourself—do you understand?" And pulling at him more energetically, he grumbled out, "To-day, for an exception, you've not treated me only to sugar and syrup, but have said some unpleasant things to my face,—now, don't be angry, young sir, but it has really pleased me—indeed, it has truly. It may be—h'm—that I can't stand the pistol at my breast. Now pay attention. I do not refuse you the agency, but I must have time to consider—do you understand? I must have that—I will not be forced."

Without waiting for a reply, he turned again to the window and recommenced his drumming on the panes. He seemed to be struggling with himself, for he muttered that his daughter Dina expected a few friends to tea that evening, and that it would give him much pleasure if Bruno would join them. Fräulein Dewitz and the girl—what was her name——?

"Lina."

"Yes, they're to be there, and your eldest brother too, and I hope you'll come," added Hollander, as his employé preserved a strict silence.

Then Bruno forced himself to ask in a firm voice when he would know for certain about his post.

This tenacity, this business-like firmness, seemed to impress the Consul. He nodded his head thoughtfully several times, then shuffled up to Bruno and tapped his arm vehemently. "Quite right—don't be put off by trifles—quite right. I'll let you know in a fortnight. And now you can go, Klüth—I must get properly dressed. Good-morning—the devil take you, good-morning!"

CHAPTER IV

BRUNO VISITS PAUL

ON the morning of the same day, the Consul's servant brought Fräulein Dewitz the invitation to tea. On the card stood in Dina Hollander's clear hand: "We expect Miss Lina also."

"Do you hear how prettily she writes?" asked Fräulein Dewitz, well satisfied, as she rubbed up her spectacles in the kitchen. "She is really a very well-bred girl. You should notice her manners, for in those Swiss boarding-schools you learn the very best. And now, my child, put on your apron, so as not to spot your pretty blue frock."

And while the sewing-mistress looked round the dark, narrow room called by courtesy the "kitchen," because an oil-stove stood on the white scrubbed table, she moistened her lips, and said, half in doubt, "Shall we save these nice cutlets for to-morrow? There's always so much to eat at Hollander's. It's a pity to eat too much beforehand. What do you think? Yes? And now tell me what are you going to put on?"

"Oh," replied Lina carelessly, "why should I make myself specially smart?"

The teacher moved her head doubtfully. But she did not contradict. It always gave her a secret

feeling of comfort to know that best clothes were lying carefully folded in the wardrobe.

The old lady took her afternoon nap in the alcove between three and four. Then a sabbath stillness prevailed in the bright rooms. The blind with the blue pictures was let down, and a restful twilight shone through. At that time Lina went about on tiptoe, and nothing was heard except the bells of a sleigh which came along the road from the country, and the old lady's calm breathing.

But Heaven knew why her sleep was broken to-day. Was it the anticipation of the party at the Consul's that excited her, or was there really some rustling and disturbing noise? After a quarter of an hour, she got up, and opened the door of the next room.

She stopped in astonishment on the threshold.

Lina was moving to and fro in front of the mirror, by the side of which she had kindled a light, in order to see her slender figure better in the dark gown which fitted close up to the neck. She slowly passed her hands down her waist, then let her head fall backwards. Her chest expanded, her eyes closed—it must have been a pleasant dream that held the young girl.

Fräulein Dewitz felt for her spectacles, but could not find them. Good heavens! did the flickering light deceive her, or was Lina really moving about in that extraordinary way? The old lady's head began to tremble with astonishment. "Good gracious, Lina!" she brought out at last. "Whatever are you doing?"

An imperceptible tremor went through the girl's limbs, then she turned round, and a childish, half-embarrassed smile hovered on her lips.

"Oh, auntie, I only wanted to see whether I had grown out of this frock. You said yourself that I ought to look nice at Hollander's to-day."

"Yes, yes, that's true." Fräulein Dewitz shook her head, and recalled the supple movements. "Yes, but a young girl should not be so vain. I don't like that."

Then Lina flew up to her and put her arm round her. "Auntie, I only wanted to give you pleasure, don't you see?"

"Me?" Fräulein Dewitz looked at her protégée's thin, animated face, and was appeased. Of course that was quite different. "Now go and make our coffee," she bade her at length,—"not too strong. But first put the light out here. That was really an extravagance."

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At the same time the Consul's invitation was being considered in a little room at Widow Wilhelmi's, in Rakower Street. Klüth's eldest son, Paul, the theological student, stood at the window and looked out into the narrow, crooked street. Outside all was dark grey twilight and whirling snow; not a footstep was audible; the harder flakes sometimes tapped against the panes, and gusts of wind moaned up from the river.

Behind the lanky man with the overworked expression of countenance, an eleven-year-old boy sat at the table, on which stood a simple lamp. He

was busily copying something from a book with a scratchy pen, and was one of the student's numerous pupils who provided him with the scanty means of existence. Year in, year out, it was always the same. It was small wonder that such conditions of life had not made Paul more cheerful or sociable.

A rattling sound came from the cuckoo clock on the wall; the wooden bird jumped out and called cheerfully: Six o'clock. At nine the young man was invited to the Consul's. Paul frowned. Wasn't it strange that he would meet his newly returned brother there first?—that Bruno, the only member of the family who came near him in education, should not have come to see him in intimate brotherly fashion?

The darkness increased in the narrow street. And Paul dived more deeply and searchingly into his inmost soul. Yes, that was the strange thing in his nature. He felt quite clearly that in his innermost thoughts he was a stranger to all the members of his family—lively, imaginative Bruno; pretty, unreliable Lina, whom he did not in the least understand; even Hann, with whose helplessness he felt a deep compassion, and yet something all-embracing, all-compelling, drove, nay, lashed him to cling unceasingly to that family at all hours, and with all his strength, to observe it, to help it, and ever to appear to make its affairs his own. So, all through the years, despite his antipathy to cross-grained Siebenbrod, he had spent one evening a week with his mother at Moorluke; during the period of Bruno's apprenticeship he had seen him

nearly every day; and he had often sat, a specially cherished guest, in Fräulein Dewitz's shining parlour.

His thoughts wandered more and more. Why did not Bruno come? Had he given himself up entirely to the luxurious, elegant life of the rich commercial city?—a life that Paul continually quarrelled about with his younger brother, not concealing his displeasure. Perhaps Bruno found it disagreeable to put up with his brother's eternal reproaches? Oh, if that were possible! Paul bit his lip, and stared more gloomily into the grey whirling darkness—no, perhaps it was wrong of him not to go at once and see what had become of the youth. He wished—— The scratching of the pen behind him ceased.

The little fourth-form boy, who had been casting longing eyes at the clock, lifted up his head sadly, and then pointed to a place in his book with his finger and asked—

“Herr Klüth, is Semiramis masculine or feminine?”

Paul flew into a rage. “What?—what? If Queen Semiramis——”

“Yes, for it says in Ostermann that Semiramis lived exactly like a man, and so I thought——”

“Semiramis is a woman,” snapped the teacher, who had no sense of humour, returning to the window. But the chain of thought was broken. The snow whirled more wildly through the street, the wind moaned more loudly round the corners, and the pen which the boy—satisfied as to the sex of Semiramis—again guided busily over the paper, scratched discordantly.

Then there was a sharp knock at the door.

"Come in!"

On the threshold stood a young man in an elegant fur coat and silk hat. Paul did not recognise him. He was on the point of going towards the stranger to ask him what he wanted when a well-known voice struck his ear.

"Well, old fellow, how are you?"

"Bruno? You?"

"Me, your reverence."

It sounded so fresh, so young, that for a moment pure joy coursed through Paul's anxious heart. Forgetting his awkwardness, with a haste he never had known before, he rushed at the new-comer as if to embrace him. Confronted by the beautiful fur coat, his impulse changed, however. He only grasped his brother's hand quickly, impetuously, almost longingly, and he felt very happy when the other shook it with great vehemence.

"Bruno!" he uttered in his stammering fashion,—
"my dear brother!"

"Old fellow," laughed Bruno cordially. "Now you can be happy."

"Yes, I am happy—I am glad."

At the moment he no longer saw Bruno's outer wrappings, which at first had estranged him; he recognised only his brother's pleasant, beloved features, and drew him farther into the room.

The guest looked about him in surprise. The bareness of the room, the smell of tobacco, and the rough furniture did not seem to please him.

"Do you always live amid such ugliness?" he asked pityingly, while he affectionately stroked the student's cheek.

The other drew back from the caress. It did not seem proper before his pupil. "Ugly?" he replied. "It's all quite comfortable here."

"Well, I've nothing to say against it," agreed Bruno, and sat down on the chair by the window. Without taking off his hat, he impatiently drew circles on the floor with his ebony stick, and it seemed as though he only meant to stay a few minutes.

Paul looked at him sadly. "Won't you take off your coat?" he asked.

"Of course—certainly—only I thought——" He pointed to the boy, who pricked up his ears.

"Oh, I can go," said the lad, looking delighted, and beginning to gather his books together. But such a proceeding was not in accordance with Paul's sense of duty. He pointed out to his brother with a serious air that the boy was preparing for promotion, and that his daily task ought not to be interrupted. Would Bruno excuse him just for a short time? Then master and pupil bent over Ostermann, and with a smile the young business man listened to their loud murmuring; long since forgotten crumbs of Latin struck his ear, and not until the disputes of Semiramis over the throne were settled, and the "cuckoo" had cried "Seven," was Walther Müller allowed to go home. He bowed ceremoniously to Paul's brother, and then, walking backwards, withdrew through the door.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Bruno, who had meanwhile taken off his coat, and now threw himself into

the sofa corner,—“thank God that we’ve done with these schoolboy years!”

“You’re happier now, then?” inquired the student, who had taken a chair opposite his brother, and pushed the lamp aside so as to see him better.

“Happier? Of course. What lean years those were, Paul! Just think! If we smelt roast meat, why, it was a fête day.”

“H’m—I hardly remember that.”

“Oh, you?—and then with old Hollander, the feeling of oppression, of terrible dependence—no, thank God, we’ve got away from all that.”

Almost caressingly he stroked the fur of his coat, which hung over the back of the sofa by him. Then he pushed back his hair, and continued with animation, “You mark, our turn ’ll come.”

“What do you mean, Bruno?”

“My good fellow, don’t look so astonished—do you smoke?” And he handed him a pretty little silver case.

But the student refused—he only smoked a pipe.

“Fie!” and Bruno made a grimace. “These are Russian cigarettes. They have the finest aroma. Just smell— isn’t it delicious? Well, and what I mean is—why shouldn’t we rise to greater heights? It’s a well-known process—the upper ones die off, and the lower fill their places.” So saying, he spread out his arms so that his chest expanded, and his whole figure grew taller.

The student supported his head in both his hands and looked more searchingly at the youth. He could not feel quite clear about him.

"Tell me how you lived in Hamburg?" he asked.

And Bruno told him. And while he lighted one cigarette after another, and blew great clouds of smoke which he pushed away with his hand, he began to grow enthusiastic over his own description.

And he set before his anxiously listening brother in gay, glittering pictures the life and bustle of the great city, the busy stock-exchange, the shipping, the excitement of speculation, of overseas trading. It sounded like a shout of jubilation—he himself had already an income, and it would increase more and more—he would raise the whole family—for money was a power, a magician's wand which could bring to life and kill. "Oh, you'll see—you'll see!"

Then he sat down again—he was the same boy who had crouched on the ruined wall with the feverishly excited child and whispered all the mad things into her ear, which sounded like the chink of gold coins.

And the elder brother looked up at him, silent, afraid; his eyes grew bigger, and he did not himself know why his heart began to beat so painfully against his chest.

CHAPTER V

AN EVENING PARTY AT HOLLANDER'S

"ASKED to tea, and then four courses—hot, and ice at the end!" whispered Fräulein Dewitz to Lina, when at length they got up from the Consul's table in order to go into the music-room. "Did you notice the celery glass? Your brother Paul asked me what it was for! Heavens! But your brother Bruno—really, he has most excellent manners; it is delightful to see how nicely he behaves at table. You can see that he is accustomed to good society. And now, Lina, shake hands with the Consul,—and don't be so silent; you're not usually like that."

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During the meal there had been some dispute about the words of "Yankee Doodle," to which, Bruno comically informed them, the young ladies of the best Hamburg society had lately started dancing some extraordinary steps. The Consul, who sat at the lower end of the table, next Fräulein Dewitz, to whom he did the honours in courtly fashion, was irritated at this new folly of the day.

"They'll dance nigger dances next!" he whispered, grumbling, to the sewing-mistress. "Yes, yes, in our time they danced minuets, and at most a Schottische—

ah God! and how delightful it all was! Yes, and I remember, too," added Hollander, "what pretty, slender feet they had then."

"H'm!"

Fräulein Dewitz gulped down her sweet wine and began to blush, and Herr Knabe, the Tax Commissioner, who, a school-friend of the Consul and an old bachelor, was the only stranger present, and had taken Lina in to supper, cleared his throat, and spoke for the first time: "Ah yes, I remember too very well." And then he pulled at his old-fashioned black cravat, winked into his glass, and smiled quietly down into the sparkling Rhine wine.

The younger members of the party gathered round the large American grand piano. The Consul and his friend lighted their cigars in the adjoining smoking-room; Aunt Matilda, the Consul's sister, who presided over his household, moved about here and there; and Dina Hollander leaned on the piano and looked through the music. "No," she said at length, "'Yankee Doodle's' not in this volume of national songs."

There was something quiet, sure, deliberate in her voice. Standing there in her simple white frock, with her bright fair hair and her tall, slender figure, a sort of fragrant purity surrounded her which gave Bruno, who had sat next her at table, a feeling of shyness before the girl's candour, and made him find in the repose of her eyes almost an affront to himself. It was a mad thought, and yet he could scarcely imagine that she meant to challenge him to soften,

to overcome her indifference, or to show him that the father's mistrust had descended to the daughter. But why? Why?

Unconsciously a kind of discord had come into his manner. Sometimes he would be shy, and would be careful how he behaved; then he became very lively, and was seized with a desire to let himself go, to please. And through it all he was penetrated by the feeling that he was secretly and constantly watched by the Consul. No, he could not win the approval of this family.

The whole evening he felt a discomfort which he would have liked to get rid of, and which for ever drove him to fresh attempts.

"What a pity!" said Aunt Matilda, when she came in again with the coffee-cups. "I should have liked to hear the American popular song just once. In the family circle nothing matters, dear Fräulein Dewitz—does it?"

"If you will permit me, I'll gladly play you the melody," offered Bruno unexpectedly, bowing to the aunt, and at the same time looking almost anxiously at his chief's daughter.

Everybody was surprised. Paul, who in an unfashionable black coat was leaning behind the window curtains, moved uneasily backwards and forwards. This was the first he had heard of his brother's musical powers.

"Do you play?" asked Aunt Matilda, not unkindly.

"Yes, a little—by ear."

"Really?" said the Consul, who had been peeping through the door for a moment. "That is interesting."

AN EVENING PARTY AT THE HOUSE OF THE
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He waved his hand to his daughter with a jovial air, and sat down again by his friend, and in spite of their continued smoking the two old men seemed to listen attentively to what followed.

And Bruno showed off his gift to the greatest advantage. A fresh, cheerful tone came out under his fingers; his hands flew over the keys. Full and melodious, with rippling accompaniment, the striking air,

“Yankee doodle went to town,”

sounded through the room.

All were influenced by the merry tune. Even Dina turned slowly round and looked in surprise at the player; and the little spark that glistened in her eyes inspired Bruno to venture farther. He felt that he must overcome the silent hostility that prevailed against him here. He was a child of fortune; usually he won all hearts, but here—and suddenly he began to sing the words of the song in his clear voice.

“Oh, how nice!” whispered Aunt Matilda, at which Fräulein Dewitz tapped her significantly on the shoulder; the Consul appeared at the door again, rubbed his chin a little, and returned to his old friend; but Dina opened her mouth slightly, and Bruno recognised by her fugitive smile that he had succeeded in pleasing the silent girl a little.

But he wanted more—he must win their sympathy. He had the feeling that he was fighting for his whole future life.

Lina sat behind Fräulein Dewitz’s arm-chair, and bent her pretty head so far forward that her chin almost touched the back of the chair. Whenever

Bruno had glanced her way, he had noticed the quick breathing under her tight-fitting black frock ; he saw that her eyes were moist, and that the pretty, small feet, unconsciously following a powerful impulse, moved up and down to the music.

Bruno was carried away by his own excitement, and only Paul, waiting in silence, half hidden behind the curtain, observed that a swift sinister glance darted from Lina's eyes towards the daughter of the house, who continued to smile more and more gladly and unsuspectingly.

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In the smoking-room the Consul bent towards his friend and whispered something in his ear. Whereupon the Tax Commissioner took careful stock of the group at the piano, produced an eyeglass with a frame of dark horn, carefully polished it, and looked most searchingly at the handsome young man who for the moment seemed to be amusing the others so successfully.

"Well, Julius, what do you think?" asked Hollander, seemingly much puzzled and embarrassed.

"But, my good fellow, what is there to think about?" replied the old gentleman softly. A sly expression passed over his smooth-shaven countenance. The Consul knew it. During his long service at the Harbour Custom House, his friend had learnt to see things through their wrappings. He knew mankind through and through.

"Well?"

"By Jove, a very talented young fellow."

"Yes, but——"

"But what?"

"My dear fellow—I mean, how do you like him?"

The Tax Commissioner laughed softly to himself. The question seemed to amuse him. Then he laid his hand gently on his comrade's knee and with good-humoured irony said, "Am I going to marry him? But look at the two young ladies! One is laughing, and the other is crying."

"Well, that would be——" The Consul jumped up, and threw his cigar away.

"On the whole, I like him very well," concluded the old bachelor, blinking ironically.

The Consul went into the music-room and took up a position, with his legs apart, by the instrument, just as Bruno ended amid great applause.

"Bravo—bravo!" he shouted, clapping his hands loudly.

Bruno started. He was greatly struck by the noisy approval of his chief. You never knew what to make of this strange old man. Had he considered his song improper, perhaps? Quick as lightning he looked round, in order if possible to learn the truth from the faces of the others. And there he saw only contentment.

"How fresh and melodious your voice sounds!" Dina broke the silence. "Thank you so much, Herr Klüth." She was about to shake hands with him, when the Consul, as if unwittingly, pushed between them.

"Very nice, very nice—admirable, my dear Klüth.

I had no idea that you could do that kind of thing too,"—tapping him on the shoulder. "But now we'll make way for the young ladies—eh?" Thereupon he shuffled up to Lina, with whom he was always making his grim jokes, took hold of both her hands and pulled her up. "Now, you little witch, the castanets are still hanging over the piano—the tarantella—you know—on my birthday—eh?"

"Sir!" stammered Lina.

"Well, what are you crying for, you little ballet dancer?"

"I'm not crying."

But the bright drops that hung on her eyelids fell uncompromisingly. Then she hastened to the piano, quickly took the castanets off the wall, leaned against the instrument, and her eyes sought Bruno, as if she waited for a sign from him in order to begin the swift, serpent-like dance which she had learnt about a year ago. She saw no one else in the company at all, she only desired from wounded pride to show her art to him who occupied so much of her thoughts.

"Yes, yes," grinned the Tax Commissioner, who had come into the room full of astonishment,—“that would be nice.”

"Lina," called *Fräulein* Dewitz with severity, slowly rising from her chair, but she did not believe that the situation was serious. Meanwhile Paul left his hiding-place and anxiously approached his foster-sister. He had plainly seen the strange glances of the Consul and the Tax Commissioner, as well as Dina's surprised, reflective smile, and he felt as if

these rich people wanted to make a troop of mountebanks of his family.

"Lina," he said harshly, "the Consul is only joking."

"It is time for us to go," added Fräulein Dewitz firmly, and put her handkerchief in her pocket.

"I'm so sorry," said the Consul, tapping Bruno on the back. "Would have gladly kept you a little longer. Well, another time, my dear Klüth, another time—eh?"

The party broke up. Only Lina tarried a moment at the piano, and as in a dream slowly laid the castanets on the top.

"Lina!" called Fräulein Dewitz impatiently.

Terrified, she flew after the others, and with her usual dexterity helped the old lady into her old-fashioned fur cloak. The Tax Commissioner, who wore a fashionable grey high hat, offered Fräulein Dewitz his arm. At the last minute the Consul rushed into the hall and secretly handed Lina a small parcel.

"There," he observed, tapping her cheek, "for a souvenir;" and, bowing to all, he added aloud, "Good-night, good-night. I hope you'll get home safely."

Paul and Bruno accompanied the two ladies to the door of their house, and then took their way back over the thick white snow. Slowly and heavily the flakes fell round them. Not a sound was to be heard in the narrow streets; a misty darkness enveloped everything, and only the dull, ghost-like light of an occasional petroleum lamp penetrated the gloomy veil.

At last Bruno, who had put his arm in his brother's, said, "Let's go across to the tavern—to Kroll's?"

Paul refused. It was not the custom in a small town. He begged Bruno for the future not to indulge in such pleasures. Bruno sighed and nodded—yes, now it must be again "early to bed." It really was too stupid.

And so they walked on—Paul gloomily pondering whether Bruno had not behaved too unceremoniously, had not put himself too much forward, in this first visit to his chief's house. And he was also worried when he remembered how the Consul had encouraged Lina to that mad dance. Why should he have done so? Had his daughter put the idea into his head? He felt more and more unpleasantly affected by the affair.

Bruno, however, soon forgot his annoyance about Kroll's. His expression grew brighter, his thoughts more kindly, and he began to hum softly "Yankee Doodle." Suddenly, giving voice to his thoughts, he exclaimed, "A nice - looking girl Dina, isn't she?"

Paul frowned. "Yes," he replied slowly, "and she has a good disposition, too."

But the young merchant did not hear that praise. He shook himself comfortably in his fur coat and dusted the snow from his feet. "Anyway, the Consul seems to idolise her. Don't you think so?"

The student moved his head impatiently, and quickly took his arm from his brother's. "Here you are at home," he said, without answering his remark. "Unlock the door quietly, so as not to disturb them."

"You're right. The old man doesn't approve of late hours."

After he had turned the key in the old wooden gate, he gave his brother an affectionate handshake. In stepping back, a light that glimmered red through the curtains of a window above fell on him. Bruno gazed up with interest, then poked his comrade gently in the side. "She sleeps up there."

The conversation became more and more disagreeable to the student.

"Go to bed now, Bruno," he warned him, "but quietly. Do you hear?"

"Yes, yes—on tiptoe. It was a pleasant evening, though, wasn't it? Well, good-night."

Fräulein Dewitz had likewise retired to bed without many words. She, too, could not get the challenge made by the Consul to her protégée out of her head, and almost unconsciously she was annoyed with Lina that such a thing should have happened. In future she must look after the girl more carefully. The little one was older now, and in the view of all reasonable people the world had grown considerably worse since Fräulein Dewitz's young days. "Yes, yes, I must look after her better." There-with she folded her hands, put her snow-white nightcap straight, said her formal prayers, and fell asleep.

As soon as Lina heard the soft snoring, she crept into the kitchen in order to hang out her mistress's clothes to air. She quickly threw off her own frock, and then took the little parcel which Hollander had

secretly given her out of her pocket. When she opened it she saw the pair of castanets.

A burning spark began to glimmer in Lina's black eyes. The little wooden instruments took possession of her soul. Almost unconsciously she took the toys between her fingers in the correct artistic fashion, and her vivid imagination carried her back once more to the Consul's grand piano, to the place where she would have so much liked to show to advantage before one person. Gently she bent her arms and with a sharp blow knocked the castanets together. Lina staggered forward, and the dream had vanished without leaving a trace. She listened again. No, thank Heaven, the snoring sound was still going on in the alcove.

With a decided gesture, she packed up the gift, quietly opened the kitchen window, and with a powerful swing of the arm threw the parcel into the deep snow of the neighbouring garden. She waited a moment at the open window. It seemed to her as if the flattering tones of a man's voice called to her from the distance. The cold outside felt cutting to her young chest, a shudder ran down her back. She began to tremble from head to foot.

CHAPTER VI

HANN AT HOME

"EV'NIN' all," said old Kusemann, with a courtly swing of his right leg, as he entered the Klüths' tiled kitchen on one of the following cold winter nights. The snowstorm howled outside, and blew clouds of pine smoke down the chimney. Round the hearth, on which a big wood fire crackled under a brass kettle, sat the Klüth family, busily mending the blue silk fishing-nets, which demanded very special attention.

The mother had grown much older. Her hair had thinned and become a silvery white. She supported her feet on a stool, for her legs swelled in the evening and pained her.

Siebenbrod, on the contrary, had grown stout. As father of a family, he was now round and plump; only his hook nose in all its crimson splendour reminded one of the past.

"Ev'nin' all," observed old Kusemann, limping a little farther into the gloomy, half-lighted kitchen, on the brick walls of which strange red shadows played. "Here, this is a nice welcome."

The pilot raised his eyebrows and whistled, as if he desired to emphasise the high rank of the person who had sent him here with a message. Then he shook a

thick layer of snow from his pilot's cloak, and without waiting for an invitation, sank coughing into a chair.

For a space there was quiet in the room. Only the crackling of the wood under the kettle and the click of the needles was to be heard.

Old Kusemann looked in surprise from one to the other. But as they all went on with their work, he took a cutty pipe from his cloak, knocked it out carefully against his chair, filled it with fresh tobacco which he took loose from his pocket, and began to puff at it in great content.

"Yes, indeed," he uttered at length comfortably, "a greeting."

"From whom?" asked Siebenbrod, as he reached for a fresh spool.

When old Kusemann found that he was questioned at last, he gave a satisfied murmur and whistled softly. "From a very fine gentleman indeed," he returned impressively, as if he could tell an important secret. "I met him at the shipyard office."

"Our Bruno, I suppose?" interrupted the mother quickly, without any change of expression in her immovable face.

"Well," said the pilot importantly, "I should no longer call him by his first name without the Mr. He's much too fine a gentleman now for that. Yes,"—he coughed and blew a couple of artistic rings, and glanced slyly at Siebenbrod through the circles,—“yes, I hear that in the different offices they're saying that Hollander intends to appoint him one of his agents shortly—something of the sort is in the wind. And then——” He made a

swallowing noise, and tried with his squinting eyes to discover whether the Klüths' curiosity was not at length aroused. But the family went on indifferently with their mending.

"And then—h'm—there's a daughter. And people do say—there's something in the wind, don't you think so?"

But even this news made no impression. They all kept on silently at work. Only Siebenbrod moved, set the kettle straight, and then listened outside, whence the grunting of pigs could be heard through the storm. He asked, "Mother, have they everything?" by which he meant fodder, and after the little woman had nodded affirmatively, nothing was heard again but the click of the needles.

"Well, if they won't," thought the pilot, "it can't be helped;" and stretching his legs, and blowing mighty clouds of smoke, he began to talk to himself.

"Well, why shouldn't such a thing happen? I read in my youth—of the Empress Catherine—she, well, married her coachman. And when she'd had enough of him, then every few months a new Cossack——"

At that moment a strong gust of wind blew down the chimney, the fire flickered, and an acrid cloud of smoke filled the room.

"Ugh!" coughed old Kusemann. "We must have a glass of grog now for our throats."

At this hint Hann looked quickly over at his mother. But the little woman timidly kept her eyes down, and Siebenbrod raised his head and counted. The clock struck. Seven—eight—nine.

"It's time for bed, mother."

"Yes—yes——"

"And just the moment for a nightcap," chimed in the pilot.

Siebenbrod got up and yawned. He had no intention of giving this eternally thirsty liar, who made fun of his economy, anything to drink.

"Indeed, old Kusemann, I'd like to give you one; but we've got nothing of the sort—have we, mother?"

Hann, in his corner, shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing.

"What's in the hamper that your fine gentleman son sent you from town, as he told me this morning?" asked old Kusemann; and he laughed with delight because they could not check his impertinence. "What's in it?"

Siebenbrod, who was getting more and more furious, was really in a towering rage at last.

"The hamper isn't opened," he growled,—“is it, mother?” And as the little woman did not seem to hear him, but signed to Hann to take away the footstool, because she wanted to get up, he went on violently: “Say something, mother! Open your mouth, and don't let him think that I wouldn't gladly give it him—say, I tell you, have we opened the hamper, or have we not?”

The little woman threw such an imploring glance at the pilot that old Kusemann was quite moved, and his imagination soon led him off on another tack. “To-morrow the fine gentleman's coming to pay you a visit,” he remarked, quite undisturbed, “for Sunday—he told me so himself. So I should open the

hamper to-morrow. That's a good thought—eh? Has he been to see you yet?"

"No," growled Siebenbrod, with a side glance at his wife, who stood, candle in hand, ready to light the way.

"Oh, then, it's the first time he has come?"

"Yes," snarled the fisherman.

"You'll be very glad?"

"Yes," shouted Siebenbrod, and snatched the candle. "Come, mother; we've got to be early to-morrow. Hann, see that the fire is out. We're not highly insured. Come along, mother,—not so slowly."

"Good-night, then," said old Kusemann, with a polite bow.

"Good-night."

The little woman crept forward on her smarting feet, her husband clattered behind her in his wooden shoes. Then they were heard going up the staircase.

"He's really a very nice man, your stepfather," said old Kusemann gravely.

He crossed his knees and rocked himself to and fro on his chair.

But he was immensely surprised when Hann got up, went to a little corner cupboard and took out a bottle. A golden liquid fell into the glass.

"Rum?" asked old Kusemann, while he screwed up his lips to whistle.

Without a word, Hann poured hot water out of the kettle into the glass, added sugar, and then set the stiff grog down beside his old friend.

"By God! it's good," he said exultingly, and gulped

it down in one draught, and held out the glass to be refilled. "It's first-rate—excellent! Hann, you've an ingenious turn—you'll improve. Yes, now, what I have to say—do you know why I came over to-day?"

"About my soldiering. I've to go the day after to-morrow," said Hann, who had meanwhile sat down on a chair by the hearth, and was warming his hands over the flame.

"Yes," old Kusemann affirmed thoughtfully. "It's a tiresome business, my boy. Believe me, they'll take you. And then they'll send you to Kiel as a sailor, and if the savages in the Pacific—the Carolinas they're called, aren't they?—don't shoot you from behind, the blacks in Cameroon are certain to cut your head off. There's no help for it."

"Well, then, so it must be," agreed Hann.

"Yes, my boy,—give me a little more grog—thanks, —but aren't you attached to life?"

"Old Kusemann," said Hann, looking dreamily into the flames, which were getting less and less, "I've wanted to ask you something for a long time—answer seriously—why do we live exactly?"

The pilot put his glass down slowly, and scratched behind his ear in his perplexity. At length he spat energetically, and then, as if an idea had just occurred to him, he brought slowly out: "Yes—look here—I know all about that. Men live in order to make little children."

"Only for that?"

"Yes, Hann; and, believe me, that's their noblest destiny."

Hann took down a small pair of bellows and blew up the dying fire. A dusky red light filled the kitchen. Then he stared again at the ascending sparks.

"I believe you're right, old Kusemann," he began mysteriously. "There must be people—they mustn't die out. Look here, when I was in church the other day, and saw the bent backs of all those people praying, that idea occurred to me. I thought if there were no people, there'd be no God. Nor none of the other beautiful things either."

But this solemn talk evidently bored the old man. He shouted for more grog; and when he had sipped it with thorough enjoyment, he remarked with relish, "Hann, do you know what?—the pastor says you're a phi——"

"Iosopher," supplemented Hann. "Yes, I know."

"Well, and if it is as you say, that more people must always come into the world, it's clear that God won't die out, but will remain with us a very long time; and therefore, Hann,—your good health—capital, your rum,—what about a sweetheart, eh? Why do you sit alone and mope like a bear with a sore head? There ought to be some one here to weep a little when you go to the Carolinas—or the blacks. You're not still thinking of Lina? My boy, that's exactly like what I said just now. The Empress Catherine and her Cossacks. And you don't want to be like that? Well, here's your health, Hann."

Then the dog began to bark in the snow-covered courtyard. First came a savage bellow, then a short

yelp, as if he recognised the footsteps. And then the rattling of the chain was heard as the animal, apparently satisfied, crept back into his kennel.

"Some one's coming," announced Hann.

Old Kusemann could not help laughing. "Quite correct, but in order to realise that fact it's not necessary to be a phi—you know what I mean."

Some one knocked loudly at the door. And on the pilot crying "Come in," two girls' heads, a brown and a red, peeped through the opening. But they had put on dark shawls over their hair, and their skirts fluttered in the stormy wind.

"Well, I never!" cried the pilot, in huge delight. "Hann, look! Toll the schoolmaster's two daughters! Come right in, children. You've come after me, of course,—I'm such a handsome, well-set-up fellow. Come, darling."

He drew the little one with the red hair down beside him on the chair, where the child, showing her white teeth, made herself quite comfortable.

Meanwhile Hann awkwardly asked the taller, a girl of about twenty, who stood a little shyly in the doorway, what she wanted, and with embarrassment received her answer. They had hoped to find Frau Klüth still up. A hole had been burnt in their copper kettle for boiling the linen, and they wanted to ask if perhaps——

"Of course," interrupted old Kusemann, grinning. "There's the whole array of pots and pans. And Hann, I know, will consider it a mark of honour and respect—eh, Hann?"

"Yes," agreed Hann.

There was a pause, during which Hann quickly took the copper vessel off its peg, as if he thought the affair ought to be negotiated quickly. But old Kusemann interfered. He led Clara Toll, who was really very pretty, with her full plump figure and her soft dark blue eyes, to Hann's former seat by the fire, and when with a bow he had invited her to take it, he asked inquisitively whether it was the ladies' linen they intended to boil to-morrow. Pretty sleeveless chemises with frills round the top, and drawers, and long black stockings, that all looked so nice.

Hann, feeling furious, stood in the middle of the kitchen, and filled with shame and annoyance looked at the girl, who kept her face turned to the fire, in great embarrassment. What was that? A slight shudder ran down the strong lad's neck. "Oh—old Kusemann!" he implored, and again stretched his hand out to the kettle, while Clara Toll got up, ready to take it from him.

"No, don't," objected old Kusemann energetically, taking the kettle forcibly from Hann. "The young ladies must drink a glass of grog with us. First, out of pure humanity, to keep out the cold; and then—listen, children,"—he mixed a glass for each of the girls,—“because it's a farewell cup for Hann. The day after to-morrow he's to be sent to the Carolinas, where you're apt to be shot, or to the blacks, where, as you know, the women are so droll.”

Hann noticed that Clara started at the word “farewell.” She turned towards him. Her blue eyes openly sought his. They grew moist and glistened, until a bright tear trickled down. It

shone like a glow-worm in the firelight. Unabashed, she let it fall to the ground, and then smilingly seized her glass.

"What are you crying for, my dear child?" asked old Kusemann inquisitively. "He doesn't go till the first of April."

Joy shone again in the blooming face; she drank and smiled, and said indifferently, "Well, it's all one to me. I shall be a nursing sister in April."

So they sat chattering and laughing and drinking in the smoky kitchen for a little space. The pilot leaned more closely against little Rosa, put his arm round her, and sang—

"Give me a kiss, red rosebud;
Sit on my knees, red rosebud."

The red-haired child laughed, and said simply, "You ape!" And old Kusemann on his part considered this permission to take the red head in his hands and press his swollen lips on hers.

"Now, if only my Alvina was out of the way, who knows what might happen? But she's still in excellent health."

The fire on the hearth began to die out. The sisters thought they ought to be getting back. At first they objected that Hann and the pilot should go with them and help to carry the big kettle, but when the lad without a word put the heavy vessel under his arm and stepped out into the snow, they all followed him.

No word could be heard amid the raging, whirling snowstorm. They sank deep into the soft white

carpet, and the bitterly cold strong wind drove the flakes against their faces. Hann and Clara carried the kettle between them. Only their misty forms could be seen by those behind them. They had already reached the inner village when Hann found a word to say: "Clara, don't be angry with me, but why are you going to be a nursing sister?"

He could not see her features in the darkness; he only heard the flapping of her head-covering and her skirts. She sighed—only because of the keen air.

"Hann, I don't know. One must have something to take an interest in."

Hann nodded in agreement. "You're right, Clara; that is ingrained in most of us. Well, good-night."

They had reached the low schoolhouse. A beam of red revolving light from the lighthouse pierced the darkness, and a thousand trembling rubies sparkled on the ice-covered walls. And Clara's face shone crimson and dazzling out of the gloom for a moment. Hann was terrified. But the next moment his companion was again enveloped in darkness, and offered him her hand.

"Good-night, Hann, and good luck with the Commission the day after to-morrow," she said in her calm voice.

"Oh, it'll all go as it must, Clara," he returned.

For a short space they stood hand in hand. Then two shadows appeared. "Now, run in, children," said the pilot, coming up to them and separating them.

CHAPTER VII

A SLEIGH RIDE

EARLY on Sunday morning Bruno entered Fräulein Dewitz's room with the request that Lina might accompany him on a visit to his parents at Moorluke. His brother Paul, who would have gone with him, he thought, was at church.

"Yes, yes," put in Fräulein Dewitz approvingly ; "your brother never misses the service."

The young man went on to say that the Consul's sleigh was waiting in front of the house. His chief had placed it at his disposal, so that the horses might get some exercise. In confirmation of his statement, a loud ringing of bells was heard at that very moment.

Lina stood as if turned to stone. She pressed her hands against her breast, as if to keep herself in check, to retain her self-control, in order not to fall on the handsome fellow's neck. In a sleigh—away from the town—away from the everlasting supervision of her mistress—to feel absolutely free, and with him, too, of whom she was so fond ! The neglect with which he had so long treated her was entirely forgotten, erased. Oh ! to get away from all this dissimulation, this dependent position, if only for a day—one single day !

Under her pretty blue frock, her heart beat high with excitement. Her colour coming and going, she awaited her mistress's decision. If she should say "No"!

Meanwhile Fräulein Dewitz had been considering the position. In spite of all the rules and regulations of provincial etiquette, she saw no grounds for refusing. After all, they were as good as brother and sister, the expedition would only take a few hours, they were going to their parents' house, and besides, the Consul had lent the sleigh. That decided her.

For a moment the thought darted through her head why the young man should not ask her to go with them, but at once the flattering idea arose that he could not venture to take her, Fräulein Dewitz, to his parents' house. So with a good-humoured nod she gave the necessary permission, offered her fingers with a dignified air to the gallant young man to kiss, was delighted with his low bow, and after she had asked him not to forget to give her kind regards to his mother, impressed on him that Lina must be home at nine o'clock punctually.

"Not later, you quite understand, my dear Herr Klüth?"

"Quite, of course, Fräulein Dewitz."

The brother and sister sat side by side, closely packed into the light, elegant sleigh. Brilliant sunshine, with a clear blue frosty sky, had followed the storm of the day before. The horses neighed loudly, the sleigh shot straight ahead into the shining white-

ness, as swift as an arrow, over the sparkling, frosty road which led to Klosterdorp.

It occurred to Bruno, who was quite alive to the beauty of the winter day, that his companion was very quiet. In surprise he looked at her. How strange it seemed! There she sat, as if she had utterly forgotten him, the coachman, the sleigh, the horses, indeed life altogether. She kept her head bent; her lips were slightly parted, as if she was swallowing the crisp air in an ecstasy of bliss; her sparkling eyes looked in a fixed gaze straight up the road, filled with expectation, as if demanding some unheard-of miracle.

Bruno was struck by the picture. What could it mean? He did not know that seven years of bondage had just fallen from her—that here, out in the quiet, open fields, a free woman, capable of thinking for herself, was sitting beside him.

“Lina!” he murmured in astonishment, her silence beginning to annoy him.

She smiled almost unwillingly, and shook her head. The beautiful dream must go on. It was very strange. He could not keep his eyes off her. And then it occurred to him that this slender, peculiar creature had been for many years out of his thoughts—crowded aside by the thousand and one impressions of the big city. How had she developed? He had not even taken the trouble to ask his elder brother. And besides, he said to himself, why should she have specially developed in her dependent, almost servant-like situation with the old sewing-mistress? Well, she looked very refined, very well dressed. And that pleased his taste, which was always directed to

externals. How plump and at the same time how slender she looked in her soft grey fur coat! Carefully he stroked the fur with his gloved fingers, and drew them away when he felt the firm, round arm.

At the same moment his neighbour looked at him. A swift glance at his face, and then she pressed closer to him, and again looked up at him. Bruno started. Her rosy lips seemed to mock him. But the next moment the happy passion of youth was suddenly aflame in him. All thought that she was his foster-sister—that she was trusted to his care—vanished.

He confidently twisted his moustache, and as if by chance put his arm round her shoulders.

"No," she said mockingly, and pushed his hand back firmly.

That brought Bruno to his senses. A burning sensation rose to his temples. At that moment it occurred to him what he had ventured upon, and how strangely the girl had behaved. Checking him, and yet—— Great Heaven! what was going on behind that white forehead encircled with black hair?

Then she made him start again.

"Have you any money?" she asked.

"Yes, what for?"

"Look at the organ-grinder on the curb-stone—with the wooden leg—give him something."

He emptied his purse on to her lap. It was full of three-shilling pieces.

"May I have some?" she whispered hurriedly.

He only just managed to stammer out, "Yes."

With a stifled shout, she took three, four of the coins in her hand, shook them, let them ring together,

then suddenly, standing up straight, with a violent movement she threw one silver coin after another to the old man.

The organ crashed forth. "Thank you," it seemed to sound.

"Another—and another."

The wooden-legged man swung his cap. "Hurrah!" sounded the music.

"Ah!—it was splendid—splendid!" said Lina, as she sank back into her seat.

"Lina!" stammered Bruno. But his eyes shone, the girl's wild mood infected him. He convulsively pressed her two hands under the rug.

"Ah!—it was splendid—splendid!" she repeated, as if in a dream, and closed her eyes. And then she quickly withdrew her fingers from his clasp. "Don't," she commanded harshly, and a line appeared between her eyebrows. "What do you do it for?"

Then the sleigh stopped. Some vehicles which were standing in the road before a smart-looking tavern barred the way.

"Shall we go in for a moment, little one?" asked Bruno, as if he wished to change his thoughts; "father Siebenbrod certainly won't offer us anything hot before dinner."

Lina, delighted, jumped up, and he helped her out of the carriage. He noticed what a pretty, slender foot she had when she lifted her skirt a little.

"A grand girl," he thought,—"enough to make a man mad,—gently, gently."

They soon sat in the tavern at a table by the window. It was a bare, light blue room. There

was not a picture on the walls, but in the sunshine a swarm of winter flies could be seen, immovable, taking their long sleep. In the corner was an iron stove which gave forth a glowing heat. The sound of men talking and drinking could be heard from the next room.

At first they looked out silently at the snowy road where their horses steamed under their cloths. Then the hobbledehoy daughter of the landlord brought mulled wine, and the two young people toasted each other. They looked straight into each other's eyes, the young man defiantly, as if he drank the girl's health—a proceeding she accepted curtly and with a shrug of the shoulders. But the hot drink flowed comfortably through their veins. Lina stretched herself, and her cheeks, over which the sunlight flickered, grew rosy. With a swift movement, she took off one of her gloves and lightly tapped her companion's fingers.

Bending across the table, she remarked, "Before it gets too dull, suppose you tell me something—about yourself?"

"About myself?"

"Yes, don't you remember all you told me that time before you went to Hollander's, when we sat on the wall in the grove? Has any of it come true? Do you hope to be rich soon?"

Bruno stuck out his chest and thoughtfully twisted his gold rings. "I'm getting two hundred pounds a year," he observed proudly, passing his hand through his curls with a conceited air.

"That's not much," she said decidedly.

He became eager. "But in a few weeks I'm to be agent."

"Will you get more then?"

"Much more."

"That's all right. And then"—she leaned over, supported her head on her hands, glanced at him mockingly—"then you'll marry Dina Hollander."

He started back, getting crimson with annoyance that this extraordinary being should see through him, and yet it flattered him not a little that people should think of coupling his name with that of the Consul's daughter.

"How do you know that?" he asked in a patronising tone. "I don't blazon it at every street corner."

She measured him with a half-pitying smile.

Did you think that people didn't notice you at Hollander's? Anyway, I did, at the very first glance."

"You?"

"Yes—me."

"Good heavens!" escaped from him unwittingly, and quite beside himself he stared at the little dark witch, who, sunk in thought, rocked herself in her chair, secretly enjoying his discomfiture.

Great heavens!—great heavens!—how had she developed?

"Child, how old are you exactly?" he stammered forth at last.

"Twenty-one."

"To your good fortune!" she continued, lifting her glass towards him as if in scorn, screwing up her eyes and looking at him over the sharply cut edges. "Ah! that makes one warm."

She stretched herself, got up, and walked a few times round the room with her easy, swinging gait. His looks did not cease to follow her, kindled by her movements.

"A beautiful—beautiful girl," he thought again.

Suddenly music sounded through his thoughts. The musical automatic machine in the corner began to clash forth a melody. Bruno saw the girl listening, her body bent forward, her head turned towards her companion, her fingers lightly resting on her rosy lips, while the other hand still lingered at the opening through which she had put the small coin.

"Lina!"

"'Ssh—the waltz from *Faust*."

She quickly pulled up her skirt and did a few dancing steps. He saw the pretty little feet turn, and then could control himself no longer. With a loud cry of joy, he rushed up to her, and prepared to put his arm round her waist as her partner; but she stopped, rooted to the ground, and glancing up at him angrily, said sharply, "I forbade you to do that."

And then Friedrich the coachman put his head into the room. "Hadn't we better be going?" he asked, waiting.

"All right, we're coming," replied Lina, and leaving her companion to pay, she walked straight out into the road, without once turning her head.

CHAPTER VIII

A SHOOTING MATCH AND A KISS

IT was a weary, dragging dinner in the best room of the pilot's house, and both Bruno and Lina heaved a secret sigh of relief when the mother at last said, "I think everybody has finished, Siebenbrod; let's get up."

He agreed with manifest satisfaction, for these two well-dressed people caused him exceeding discomfort. Especially because he could not eat in his own easy fashion in their presence, and just to-day he had such an enormous appetite.

"Well," he thought, full of hope, "it'll be some time before they come again."

The mother, too, delighted in her heart to see them, never talked much, and was exercised in mind to know whether all that Bruno told her of himself was right and honest, and if his bold plans could really be fulfilled.

"Ah, my God!—let me only live to see it," she thought in her inmost heart, and almost folded her hands, although her face remained perfectly calm. A stiff constraint had reigned during dinner, for Hann in his blue Sunday jersey only dared from time to time to hand his sister the dishes, or uncork the beer-bottles, which Siebenbrod had specially provided for to-day. He did not venture to join in their conversa-

tion, which they seemed to carry on for themselves alone. The tone of it was above him, and so he sat thoughtfully by, and reflected how well they suited one another. Yes, they were glad, living people; their place was rightly in the great world. And Lina did not laugh at Bruno as she continually did at Hann. He had noticed that, anyway. Yes, it was all just as it should be.

After dinner, Lina suggested that they should take a little walk in the village. And when Bruno had agreed, Hann joined them. He scarcely noticed that no invitation had been given to him.

Out of doors it was still bright. As they set out side by side, the church clock struck three.

There is nothing to equal the Sunday stillness of a Baltic village in winter-time, when the sun grows paler in the blue sky, and the wind seems to have fallen asleep on the low silvery roofs. A pleasant restfulness prevails over everything. You can hear the snowflakes fall, as they are now and again detached from the projecting eaves.

When the three turned into the street leading to the churchyard, which was lined on either side with small fishermen's huts, Hann touched his brother's arm.

"Would you," he asked emphatically, "like to see father's grave?"

It was a stupid idea. Bruno stopped, out of humour, and looked across to Lina in some embarrassment, while Hann took stock of her with frightened eyes. What! were they to spend this one free afternoon among graves?

Bruno asked if the snow would not be too thick in the churchyard; and Hann agreed with a melancholy air: "Yes, yes, with your boots it would never do—better leave it."

Lina gave a sigh of relief, but looked several times fearfully towards the churchyard. They went on, but for the next few minutes the harmony was disturbed. They broke the silence again when they unexpectedly heard a duet being sung, and noticed two girls who were walking up and down arm in arm in front of the village school and eagerly singing, although in low tones.

"They often do that on Sunday afternoons," explained Hann.

The girls' backs were turned towards the new arrivals, but they could quite clearly distinguish the words of the song, which were not exactly gay and cheerful—

"Morning dawn
Lights me to an early death!
Soon will the trumpets sound,
And I and many a comrade
Must die."

"Yes," said Hann, greatly pleased, after he had listened respectfully, "Clara and Rosa Toll have the best voices here. I always go every time they sing in the church choir."

And in his inward pleasure he gave several energetic nods, and did not see that Lina nudged her companion in the side with her elbow, and when he looked at her in surprise, that she secretly winked at the elder of the two girls.

Then Bruno was obliged to laugh.

They greeted each other. The schoolmaster's daughters curtsied to the elegant townsfolk, and Lina tapped pretty Clara Toll's cheek in so motherly a way that Clara, who was a little taller than Lina, looked down in embarrassment.

Bruno asked why they sang so sad a soldier's song, and as the elder did not answer, and only a deep crimson rose in her cheeks, the little one began to chatter without ceremony—

"Hann Klüth had told them yesterday that he had to go to-morrow to the town to be a soldier, and they had just been talking of it when they began that song. She had only been singing the accompaniment."

"Oh!" stammered Hann, and made a movement as if to take Clara's hand, but bethought himself, and stuck his right hand in his pocket. Then the church clock struck, and they parted.

The sparrows who sat in the village street or on the snow-covered boughs of the poplars chirped less cheerfully, and the snow began to take on a bluish-purple colour.

"Look!" said Lina to Bruno, as they stepped into the dry, crackling meadows which stretched to the frozen sea. "Over there!"

The ruined cloisters, which contained so many memories for the two young people, glowed in the red light; a purple flame ran down from the masses of snow; the bare oaks stood like a monstrous, white coral forest round the walls.

"There!" said Lina again, and gave her companion a fleeting glance. Bruno started. His heart

suddenly began to beat wildly, memory stirred in him. Now, now he would have pressed the alluring figure in the grey fur coat passionately to him, if—yes, if only that intruding booby had not stood by them, looking at them so thoughtfully.

The wind carried a new verse of the song to them from the deserted village street. The two girls continued to sing in their simple Sunday fashion—

“Hardly there
Before the pleasure’s ended !
Yesterday riding his proud steed,
To-day shot through the heart,
To-morrow at rest in the cold grave !”

“’Ssh ! be quiet,” interrupted a hoarse voice irritably.

Old Kusemann thrust out his oiled and curled head from his wooden watch-house, which had once been a bathing cabin, and put his finger on his lips to show in pantomime that he was engaged in business that permitted no disturbance.

“Old Kusemann, what are you doing here on Sunday ? When the Bodden is frozen over, too, and no ship can possibly come within sight ?” asked Hann, going nearer and poking his head through the narrow opening of the door, which old Kusemann tried angrily to shut in his face. “And what are those two guns doing in the corner ?”

“Oh, I was just oiling them a bit,” growled the pilot, yielding, and eyeing the two townsfolk with his squinting glance. “Oil is to those things what wine is to us.”

"Old Kusemann," continued Hann reprovingly, "they are hunting at Ludwigsburg, and you're just lurking about here in hopes that something may come over the ice to you. Weren't you had up before the Court about it last month?"

"Yes, but I was let off," said Kusemann in a tone of triumph, while he stroked his beard and grinned; "and the judge gave me a cigar because I was an old fellow-townsmen of his, and had got rid of the seals here."

And before any one else could join in the conversation, the pilot suddenly made vehement gestures with hands and legs, sprang to the corner, seized one of the guns, planted himself in the doorway, and, much excited, gazed over the ice of the Bodden. A black speck ran swiftly over the grey level.

"That's not a seal!" shouted Hann contemptuously, and tried to seize the barrel of the gun. But the pilot shook his head in scorn. "What else? It's one right enough."

Then they were all infected with the love of sport, and in increasing excitement followed the approaching speck of colour.

"Now," murmured the pilot, and lifted his gun. But to his surprise a second barrel swayed beside his.

Lina had unexpectedly sprung into the hut, seized the gun, and holding it to her cheek, stammered, her eyes sparkling, "Me too—me too!"

"Can you take aim?" asked Bruno.

"Don't know."

"Then let me do it—so."

He bent his head close behind her neck and supported the butt end with his left hand. Without appearing to notice it, she nestled so close in his arms that if he had dared his mouth could have touched her neck.

Old Kusemann grinned. "Who hits gets a kiss from the pretty girl. I hit. Bang!"

The snow rose in a cloud of dust, the dark speck moved sideways. "Look," said the pilot, in amazement, and stuck his cap at the back of his head.

Then a second shot was heard.

"It's down!—it's down!" shouted Hann; and then, as if possessed, he and old Kusemann tore across the snowy level as if for a wager, each wishing to claim the "seal" for his side.

The victors remained alone in the hut. Bruno held his hammering temples. Should he demand his reward? Softly—believing that Lina had not noticed him—he shut the door behind him, so that the red light of the wintry setting sun could only fall through the little peephole of a window. Then he hesitated again. Scarcely separated from him by a step, the girl was putting the gun back in the corner. He clearly saw the charming roundness of her limbs as she stooped. Then a bold, venturesome humour seized him. A thousand pulses were beating in his arms; he hardly knew what he was doing, and, breathing deeply, he pressed close to her side. But the sound of his breathing betrayed him. She tore herself vehemently away, and looked at him in astonishment. "Why did you shut the door?" she asked roughly.

He shook his head, and remained standing in front of her, confused and undecided. She pushed open the door with her foot.

"I don't like being in the dark," she said, with a hostile glance, and again the thought of Dina darted disagreeably through her head; then she gave a short, dry laugh.

"They're bringing the seal."

Old Kusemann crept up, feeling humiliated and quite small, although he had stolen a march on his awkward companion in getting possession of the sea-monster. A long-eared head peeped out of his jersey.

"Cursed ill-luck!" he whined. "It's a hare again. A man may have the best, the truest intentions, but you can do nothing against ill-luck. Well, good-bye."

He crept gloomily home with the unwelcome game, proud nevertheless of being "an old useful fellow-townsmen."

Lina and Bruno drove home in the darkness in a closed sleigh, which they had been obliged to hire from the landlord of the tavern, for the Consul had wished his carriage to return by daylight. Hann, who had offered willingly, climbed on to the box in his moth-eaten sailor's fur coat, and brandished the whip. He could hear his passengers' voices indistinctly within, but he did not turn round. "I mustn't listen," he thought,— "that wouldn't be right."

But he could not control his thoughts, which were entirely busied with his companions in the rattling sleigh.

"They suit each other capitally," he thought. "He talks so well, and she—so pretty and well grown and plump—why, one wants to stroke her." He stopped, terrified and ashamed.

Alas! it was this thoughtful peasant's misfortune that he possessed a keen, deep sense of beauty, and that from his youth he had been accustomed to reverence this blooming girl as the type of all womanly perfection.

"And how she moves her limbs!" he thought, still lost in admiration.

"Gee-up!" he shouted angrily in between. But the next moment his thoughts returned to their old hunting-ground. "Does Bruno care for her? Yes, it's a cursed affair. Does he mean true and honest by her?"

"Gee-up!" he shouted again, and the sleigh bells rang through the darkness and moonlight.

.....

Meanwhile the dark witch inside was weaving her enchanted spells.

The window-panes rattled, the leather frames squeaked and let in the cold air almost without hindrance. Lina breathed out several times, in order to see her breath in the flitting moonlight. Then she shivered, until at last, seeking warmth, she nestled down, without deigning to notice that her companion sat breathless beside her, dazed and enchanted by this perverse beauty. He tried by force to free himself from his evil thoughts.

"Are you tired?" he asked.

"Yes."

He timidly touched her arm.

She raised her elbow irritably. "What do you want?"

"I only wanted to ask what you've been doing all these seven years. It interests me so much."

"Good heavens! I've learnt and read,—you must have noticed that,—and I'm still doing it."

"And for what purpose?"

"Fancy your asking that!" she laughed, opening her mouth. "So that I can rise in the world. That's clear enough. There's no reason why I shouldn't be as successful as you. I'm not exactly ugly."

"No, by Heaven, that she isn't," shot through Bruno's excited mind, but she appeared wild, perverse, calculating, as it seemed to him; and, bending closer to her, he urged further—

"Are you going to take up some career?" Another hostile look was directed at him.

"If I don't make my success through marriage, then I certainly shall. I'm not going to stay at Fraülein Dewitz's any longer. No one can imagine that of me. But do you know what——?" She suddenly nestled up close to him, and dropped her head on her breast as if it was a secret. And it really was a secret.

"Lately the actors from Schwerin played in the Vogler Hall, and there was one of them, not older than me, but frolicsome and wild, and she played parts in which she befooled men. Do you know, I believe I could do that too. And when she came on in the last act, bouquets were thrown to her from the officers' boxes, until at last she kissed her hand.

Over and over again—she kissed her hand. Ah! how I should have loved to do that!”

She pursed up her lips and nodded several times, as if to confirm her statement. There! it was out—her innermost thoughts, her adventurous, wandering spirit that Bruno had only dimly discerned, but that now seized him with such power that he was scarcely master of himself, and pressed his hands against his eyes to restrain himself—to hold himself in check.

“Is anything the matter?” she asked.

He answered in the negative: “Only a bit of a headache.”

“Yes, it’s cold,” she threw in. “Let’s sleep—I’m tired.”

She leaned back, and her regular breathing soon showed that sleep came obedient to her will.

Bruno rubbed his forehead and looked at her curiously. Was she really asleep? Or did this wily little person only wish to show him how lovely she looked when the moonlight flitted over her, and how white her teeth could gleam behind her half-opened lips?

He turned away, he looked out at the road where the poplars threw dark shadows like long snakes on the snow that seemed to be crawling towards the vehicle.

But even that sight could not distract his thoughts. The sleeper moved. She pulled herself straight up; only her head was bent back, and her breast gently heaved and sank. Was she really asleep?

They were approaching the first houses of the town. Then Bruno gave up the struggle. The little dark witch was stronger than he. Rather roughly, he moved her arm, almost shaking it. He wanted to protect her against himself. "Wake up—wake up!" something cried within him.

But, obedient to the movement, the sleeper, in the intoxication of slumber, sank against the man's shoulder.

Oh, how soft and round were her lips!

He lifted her chin,—she breathed on calmly, he could even see the dimples in her cheeks by the dim light of the lamps,—and gently, gently, like a cautious thief, he stole the precious fruit.

Then there was a jerk. They stopped suddenly. Had Hann looked round? Almost as though falling off, the clumsy sailor jumped down from the sleigh, opened the door, and growled, "We're there."

"Already?" returned Bruno, sighing; and, pointing to Lina, added, "Fast asleep."

Hann stared at her in stupid surprise.

It took them both some time to wake the girl. She looked about her in surprise, stretched herself, then laughed, and said good-humouredly, "Ah!—that was a sleep. But see, the old lady's waiting for me. The light's still burning. Well, get safely home."

She sprang up the steps to the house door, nodded back at them, and vanished.

When Hann, after a while, drove slowly back, he held in his glove a ten-shilling piece. Bruno had

pressed it into his hand at parting, half as a gift, half as a tip. And the puzzled fellow looked at it by the starlight with some perplexity, and sighed deeply.

“Gee-up, my steeds!”

CHAPTER IX

HANN, THE CONSCRIPT

Two days later—at sunrise—the only golden ray that penetrated the high barred window found the Moorluke philosopher shivering and with bare head lying on the plank bed of the military prison, and staring with a stupid, surprised expression at the grey walls.

“Don’t!” he protested emphatically, expecting every minute that Siebenbrod would wake him out of his heavy dream with a kick, and therefore protecting his head and closing his eyes. But no kick was forthcoming, and the only sound he heard was the word of command in the courtyard, followed by a hard, clashing noise, as if rifles were being struck in unison against the ground.

“Heavens! Heavens!”

And then Hann opened his eyes wide.

Somewhat bruised, he crawled off the hard couch and, shaking his head, looked round him. There in the corner was the plank bed with its woollen coverlet; on the other side a chest which smelt horribly, and so betrayed its use. Nothing else. No chair—no table. Four paces in length and breadth, only bare grey walls, and a low brown door with no handle inside.

Hann pushed his hair off his forehead and shivered all over, for he was freezing. He crawled over to the door, to examine it, when a flap in it about a man's height fell down, and something made a noise quite close to it. That was certainly a good sign, and full of hope Hann put his hand through the opening, and at once received a blow on the fingers with a hard object. He drew back with a scream, and at the same moment a bearded face filled the opening.

"Not so fast, captain," rasped a voice which sounded very business-like and not at all kindly; "it's coming." An earthen water-jug and half a loaf were handed in, and the flap fell to again.

"Stop!" cried Hann, in rising desperation. "Man, why——"

"All right," rasped the rough voice, and Hann heard the flap quickly bolted. What was it all about?

Exhausted, his heart beating painfully, Hann sank down again on the bed, and stared at the jug and the bread.

Fie! there was nothing hot like his mother gave him every day, and he shivered so that the cold shuddering contracted his chest.

"Present—arrms!" sounded shrilly from below. Then a clashing blow.

Heavens! Were they soldiers? Hann was so alarmed that he nearly dropped the jug. Pictures, strange unusual pictures, suddenly rose in his slow thoughts—a room in an inn, uniforms, naked men.

Where had he been yesterday?

Suddenly with violence he put the chest straight, climbed on to it, and could then see through the barred window.

A wide, snow-covered courtyard, enclosed by a red brick wall. A soldier in a grey cloak with rifle on shoulder, paced quietly up and down before the one gateway. At the side, almost exactly below him, two rows of infantry with red hands and red faces were exercising arms under a corporal. Immovable, only the arms alive, blow on blow. Ground arrrms—Slope arrrms—Ground arrrms——

"That's it, then!"

Hann stepped down sadly. He knew enough. And after a deep draught from the jug, he struck his forehead with his hand.

"Yes—yes—he'd experienced that too. How had it all come about?"

.
A noisy procession of young fishermen and peasants in front of the Vogler Inn. Ten at a time were taken in. Hann was in the first division. He still heard old Kusemann, who had come into the town in honour of the occasion, saying, "Always think of your big toe. That'll help."

A little, square, whitewashed anteroom, with pegs for clothes, and some chairs. Inside, a non-commissioned officer—his name was Hoffmann—who twisted a big stiff moustache with a bold air, and took stock of the troop thoughtfully, and gave the command: "Undress!"

The lads undressed.

"Coat also?" Hann asked Herr Hoffmann, after he had taken off his overcoat.

"Of course—as God made you, boys," commanded the officer, pacing up and down the room with a military step.

Hann stroked his naked chest. His heart beat as he looked round at the others.

"Breeches too?" ventured Hann, after a bit.

"Confound it—you fellow—what are you making such a fuss about?" thundered the corporal.

"Because of the awkwardness."

"Oh, I see, you're one of that kind."

Hoffmann gave him a contemptuous glance and entered something in a note-book.

But the allusion was not clear enough to Hann's methodical mind. He wanted cautiously to find out "What kind?" when he felt a knock on his shoulder, so that the garments in question flew off by themselves, and an angry voice hissed close at his ear: "Hold your tongue—forward—you'll learn the rest."

The ten naked men suddenly stood in a low broad room of the inn before a long narrow table, behind which sat several officers and a few civilians. Two non-commissioned officers were writing at a side-table.

"Heinrich Kagelmacher!" they called out, after some murmuring and comparing of notes.

"Here!" answered a voice by Hann's side.

"Occupation?"

"Fisherman."

"Where?"

"Hermsmühl."

"Born—religion?"

"21st October, 1877—Protestant."

"Kagelmacher, Heinrich," murmured the official who was second in command. "That's all right."

"Kagelmacher," cried Corporal Hoffmann, leading him up to a sort of gallows where his height and weight were taken. The cross-bar sank.

"Five foot four," announced Hoffmann.

"Kagelmacher, Heinrich—five foot four," murmured the two secretaries.

"Good—now come here," a beery, good-humoured voice was heard saying, and a fat man with a red face, thick swollen lips, and shaggy white hair, stood up on his two short legs, his coat open, and beckoned with his black stethoscope.

"That must be some sort of doctor," Hann Klüth thought to himself while his neighbour was being examined. He was a big strong fellow, and the knocking and listening only lasted a short time. The staff-doctor, whom the stooping made redder than ever, stroked Kagelmacher's naked breast kindly, and winked slyly at him—

"Well, have you any complaints?"

The lad turned crimson. "Palpitations," he brought out hesitatingly.

Scarcely was the word spoken when the doctor sent a remarkably sly glance over to the tall colonel with the hawk-like head who sat in the middle of the table. He got up at once, pushed his chair back as if irritated, and paced up and down the room, uttering whispered imprecations and rattling his sword, while he kept angrily striking a sheet of paper he had in his hand.

All at once he stopped right in front of an elegant young man, who, eyeglass in eye, was following the affair, and bending far over the table.

"Well, what do you say to this kind of thing?"

The magistrate rose and whispered something to the colonel, who shrugged his shoulders, but agreed, and they both resumed their places.

Meanwhile the doctor, always slyly smiling at Kagelmacher, confirmed the "palpitations." "But it's of no consequence—you can stand back."

Next.

He is also from Hermsmühl, and has the same complaint.

The doctor observed to the magistrate that this Hermsmühl in his district seemed a very unhealthy hole.

The next three Hermsmühl men, who were too frightened not to complain of anything, to the great contentment of the doctor suffered from "palpitations" also; the doctor whistled right up the scale, and from somewhere came a suppressed curse: "The whole blooming lot."

Meanwhile it had grown very quiet in the room. The Hermsmühl men stood together in a corner like a heap of naked sinners awaiting the executioner.

The perspiration streamed from Hann's forehead, although his unclothed body shook with the cold.

He observed that all was not straight here.

"Johann Klüth" was called from the non-commissioned officers' table. He stuttered out something, his friend Hoffmann invited him under the gallows,

the cross-beam fell on his head not too gently, and a contemptuous voice announced, "Five foot three."

"Klüth, Johann—five foot three," reported the two monotonous echoes indifferently.

What happened now passed like a dream. He found himself in the fat man's hands. Something was said about a sound heart. Several incomprehensible observations followed, and then the fateful words that it was a great pity, but the man's left foot was too short.

"Reserve without liability to service."

"O God—O God—hurrah!" he cried.

Old Kusemann had already told Hann what that meant. It was the best, the very best, if only he got that——

And Hann's face lighted up; he laughed for joy, and, naked as he was, tried to make a sort of bow of acknowledgment. Then he saw with terror that the colonel hit the table with both his fists, and shouted loud enough to make the chalk fly from the walls. Why he was so excited Hann didn't in the least understand. He heard in a sort of daze——

"Insolence—to express joy here—contempt of the Emperor's service—an example must be made of such social democrats—happily they're all under military discipline to-day—the Hermsmühl band are particularly excellent——"

And when he had half come to his senses, Hann observed with stupid wonder that he was between two soldiers, who marched him through the town and delivered him up inside the red walls.

It was late afternoon, and he was still holding the bread and the jug in his right and left hands.

What did it mean? Was this serving the Emperor?

Sounds arose from below; regimentals were being shaken, and a fresh voice hummed—

“ Who will be a soldier
Must have a little gun,
Must have a little gun;
Must load it with some powder,
And a bullet too, besides.”

CHAPTER X

UNDER MILITARY ARREST

IT was the evening and the morning of the second day. Solitary confinement and low diet, like all other evils, have their good side. Hann found that he had never at any time been able to think in so undisturbed a fashion. In Moorluke there was always some interruption, either from Siebenbrod or from his mother, or from old Kusemann's untimely jests.

But here they evidently laid themselves out for thinkers. A sentry patrolled the corridor outside, so that everything should be kept quiet, and nothing should disturb him. Yes, indeed, it was a capital place for thought. You had no work to do, and yet you were most carefully looked after. There stood another jug of cold water, and a fresh loaf, and the prisoner gave it a grateful glance. It certainly was rather cold,—they had apparently forgotten to light the stove,—but he had the woollen quilt, at any rate. And he wrapped himself in it up to the tip of his nose, and cowered down on the bed, and looked attentively into a dingy corner where a spider had spun a thick web.

Slowly his thoughts came and went, like travellers carefully picking their way over an unpaved road.

And gradually queer figures came past. God and old Kusemann, the Emperor and Lina, Malljohann and the spider.

Hann sat there, and nodded his head thoughtfully at them, while from below sounded the word of command, "Ground arrrms! Slope arrrms! Ground arrrms!" The lonely fellow did not realise that he was carrying on very important work, and work seldom undertaken, namely, turning over the leaves of the ledger of life, and adding and subtracting, and at length attaining some result that could be used in life again. Indeed, every one cannot do it—most persons lack a few indispensable necessities thereto, namely, truth and modesty. But the imprisoned "social democrat," Hann Klüth, fortunately found this quiet cell greatly favoured his purposes. And so he had the power to do it.

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His meditations ran somewhat as follows :—

"And now one is grown-up, and yet nearly everything that one imagined in one's childhood, and later on, has gone awry.

"At first one was comfortable enough in one's parents' house, but then good-bye to that, and Dietrich Siebenbrod steps in; and then one has to look after oneself a bit, if one wishes to be well off—but how can a dependent boatman make things comfortable?—At last the silly fellow longs for some one, and has to see another kiss 'her' in the sleigh, when she's asleep.—Now all that is over and done with. One must make an end of it and be sensible, and every end has something restful about it. You can't

make any more mistakes, for the end is, well—the end.

“Yes, but what is one to do in the future? Well, boy, that is simple enough—one must look after one’s own happiness. Yes, but—what is happiness? That must be decided. Ah! I have it, and no one will contradict me: happiness is a great heap of silver pieces. That’s sure enough. Any one who sits on a big heap of them sits on a high mountain top, from which he can survey the whole world, if it amuses him. And who knows if the mountain to which the devil led our Saviour was not just such a heap of money? For whoever possesses sacks of grain, it’s clear he has happiness right enough—

“Stop, boy—stop, not so fast—you can’t buy everything. Health, for example, and an intelligent brain, and then—love. No, that’s true. Love, especially, confound it. If I sat on a sack of silver pieces as high as Hollander’s warehouses, Lina wouldn’t love me any the more. And then, what do the old proverbs say? ‘Riches do not bring happiness.’ There it is. I won’t be so foolish as to run amuck of a proverb. No, not I.

“Well, and what else? Happiness must lie somewhere. Let us see.

“Where does wealth come from? But that’s a stupid question. Wealth wasn’t there at the very beginning, it wasn’t present at the Creation. It must have come gradually into the world, when God laid on man the curse of work, which wasn’t very fatherly of Him. Work—stop, boy, it’s

perfectly clear that all wealth is derived from work. And if Consul Hollander has so many sacks of money, then he has really sacks full of work, of our work, of the work of others. Just consider, dare a man do that?—dare he take work from others and pile it up in his warehouses? Fie, I wouldn't do it. No, I'll have nothing to do with wealth.

"But what about work? Perhaps I may find happiness there. For that God intended work to be a punishment to the whole human race, can only be a fairy tale. I ask why God Himself worked so hard in the beginning to create everything, so that He Himself was the first weekly labourer. No, the thing must have afforded Him great pleasure, and therefore probably He wanted man to have a similar pleasure.

"And so, isn't it possible that happiness may lie in the joy of giving pleasure?"

Here Hann noticed that the web in the dingy corner trembled, and that its creator, drawing a long thread, ran to and fro. He shook his head.

"Oh, Hann, how you go chattering on to-day! Look round you. What is the spider working at? It builds a bedstead, and then eats it up again, if need be. And what does man work at? He builds a house to live in, and makes a table to eat at, and chops wood to cook his food with, and catches fish, as I do, so as to have something to cook. Thus man works only for the sake of quite ordinary, commonplace life. For nothing else. And I've certainly never found that house-building makes the mason, or fishing the fisherman

particularly happy. At least, it isn't so with us in Moorluke.

"The pastors say, it's true, that work makes a man better. Nonsense! Am I a model of goodness because I pull a heap of poor herrings out of the water every day and see them struggle round me? And what's all the bother for? Only for mould and worms. What doesn't rot decays. Yes, I see quite well that happiness in work is just a sort of consolation held out to men. We must look for it some other way!

"But first I'll go to sleep!——"

It was the morning and the evening of the third day.

When Hann had greeted his spider with a friendly good-morning, and had solemnly enthroned himself on his bed, he heard a tremendous trumpet-blowing in the courtyard. It echoed all around, and the loud waves of sound seemed actually to strike the walls.

"Whatever's that?" asked Hann, annoyed at the interruption.

"Rataplan—ratatata," replied the drums,—*"ratatata!"*

"Whatever is it? Oh, the Emperor must be coming."

But the prisoner soon discovered from the rumbling tramp of feet that it was only a division of troops marching out through the gate.

"Well, it's a comfort that's over," thought Hann, who regarded all this beating of drums and blowing of trumpets as interference with his rights. When all

was quiet again, Hann's thoughts loyally remained with the Emperor. In spirit he took off his hat.

"That's something like," he said; "now I call that a post worth having."

He put his hat on again.

"It doesn't come to nobodies, of course; but a man like that with power has happiness at his doors. I can just imagine that when such a man merely whistles, ten servants butter him a roll—and then he whistles again, and another ten pull off his boots. Yes, I should like all that, but—h'm—what about attempts at assassination? I remember what old Kusemann read out to me once about the Russian Czar. There's a certain class of people who think it right to murder those in high positions. I drink a cup of coffee—it's poisoned. I cordially press some one's hand—and the creature sticks a knife into the nape of my neck. Confound it! that sort of position doesn't attract me in the least. And how anxious the poor Emperor's wife must be as she sits at home! No, that would be a desperate sort of existence.

"Well, so far as I can see, I've looked round at all kinds of human life, and happiness does not seem to be present in any of them. But a thought strikes me: perhaps it's with happiness as with God—it's invisible."

He was so delighted with the idea that he struck the bed with such force that the cobweb in the corner trembled. And as he'd now got as far as "God," he went on—

"Yes, it may lie in our inward thoughts and doings, especially in piety. To him who is pious all blessings are promised. 'Happy is——' No, I can't remember

it, but it is true that he who depends on things up above comes to the conclusion that a long thread is tied to his hands and legs, like the puppets in the Christmas show, and he is guided at each step from above, so that he can scarcely make a false one. Truly that must make things very safe! It's almost like the new-fangled fire insurance which says, 'Let the house burn, the fire insurance Phoenix will pay for the damage.' Certainly he won't be left to want, with such an insurance in heaven.

"But societies have been instituted against begging; beggars are put into prison. And yet those same societies go and beg of God unashamed. For, after all, what is praying but begging? And for what sorts of things do people worry God? One respecting his sick pig, the other for a kiss from a pretty wench, and Haberkorn the peasant at Poggenpfuhl asked whether he might not let his wife die of eating a poisonous toadstool. And if on the same day the first prays for rain and the second for sunshine, what is the Lord to do? There is no human possibility of deciding between them.

"It goes against the grain when I see all these people creeping into church like thieves to filch something for themselves. I always thought they ought to take God something, even the stupidest good deed—for instance, helping a drunken man home, so that he comes to no harm. And not always merely to hold out the hand begging. What sort of an impression can that make on God in the long-run? Now, if I was He, I would have a notice against begging

put up in the churches. Yes, but then with God especially——”

Hann Klüth did not finish his sentence, but in terror wrapped himself more closely in the woollen coverlet, for the evening twilight had already fallen. He shivered.

“Old Kusemann says we can’t know whether—h’m—no, no, old Kusemann, I’m not going to be talked into denying my God; you’ve only to shut your eyes or to go into deserted places to feel how near He is.

“And I say it from knowledge.

“Does an exact knowledge of all things, such as the professors here in the town have, make people happy?

“The idea is laughable. For the students whom I take out on the Bodden always say that what one of the professors knows, another one thinks to be just the contrary. And if one declares that all life originates in the air, the other believes that it originates in the water—and Professor Römer says its origin is to be found in the Old Testament. How puzzled the students must get when the three come one on the top of the other! May Heaven preserve me from such a botheration——”

“Hold your jaw!” shouted the sentry in the corridor, and knocked at the door. And Hann stretched himself on his couch, while his breath steamed in the cold air.

And it was the morning and the evening of the fourth day.

"In time this'll become perfectly horrid," said Hann Klüth. "I'm freezing, and all my limbs are getting stiff. Am I to be imprisoned here for ever for my country's sake? I can't bear it much longer. The bread lies in my stomach like a stone, and the cold water makes my whole body shudder. And I haven't done anything. Why are they so severe with me?"

He got up slowly and dragged his stiff limbs over to the corner, to his friend in the spinning-house. He was terror-struck to find the little spider, its feet drawn under it, stiff, a mere crumb!

"God in heaven!" he stammered, "what does this mean? Frozen? Why, the same thing could happen to me at any moment, for I feel most wretched." In a terribly depressed state he tottered back to his bed, his head sank on his chest, and his fatigue and exhaustion increased by leaps and bounds.

"Extraordinary, most extraordinary," he murmured, "that men should behave so ill to each other. And yet there's nothing better than to love some one very dearly. But what's that to do with me? I shall never love any one any more, nor will any one ever love me, for I shall lie down like the spider, and never get up again."

So saying, he pulled the grey coverlet over him, fixed his blue eyes, expressionless, on the barred window, through which the light of the frosty day fell upon him, and lay perfectly still.

Then there was a noise at the door. The bearded face again appeared at the open flap and shouted to

Hann to take in the pot, as it was very hot. "Extra rations," he added by way of explanation, "fourth day. Release at one o'clock."

Hann, his face beaming, newly alive as it were, breathed in the steam that rose from the hot vessel. It contained beans and bacon, and only to see how hot it was, how beautifully hot!

Long after he had finished his meal, he sat on and gratefully stroked the vessel.

"Yes," he said, addressing it, "at home with mother I eat that sort of thing for different reasons, which I do not need to touch on here. But here—h'm! How easy, how childishly easy it is for a man to be kind to his fellow-creatures! Often even, just as in this case, a pot of hot beans suffices. Confound it, how good they were! I've been thinking for so long over human happiness that this pot of beans only teaches me that after all a little love is the chief thing. Even a pot of beans, not from the hands of one we love, but from those of a filthy wretch we loathe, is so good that one can almost imagine it is really potato soup with sausage, of which I am so fond.

"Yes, but whom is one to love? God? That's a matter of course, just like our parents; but somehow not exactly. For it can never come to the real sort of love expressed in words and caresses. There's too much reverence about it for that.

"And to love all mankind, as our Lord Jesus would have us do? Well, I would gladly do that; but there, as I lately heard old Kusemann say, you would be

a confounded social democrat, and you neglect your own business too much if you put your fingers into every one else's pie.

"Then what remains? Oh, Hann, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Why, the best of all remains—women, and Lina is the most beautiful of them all."

Here he gave a deep sigh.

"Yes—after all, that must be happiness; for people all round are striving for the same thing. What other reason could make Pökel, the miller in Moor-luke, have a fifth already, unless it is that a man can't live without affections of this kind? Then comes the question, what does being happy with women consist in? Is it always being with them? No, the proverb says, 'Too much is unwholesome.' So it can't be that.

"I think it must be with most people as with me: it is the longing, the longing for some one; that is the most beautiful thing possible, that is happiness indeed."

Here he gave a deep, heavy sigh, pitiful to hear. For whither his longing had been directed in his boyhood he well knew. And it was equally certain that the feeling must be overcome, if he did not wish people to scoff and laugh at him.

"No, no." Sadly but manfully he pulled himself together. "Clara Toll—Clara Toll,—I say it over and over again, so that I may write the name firmly on my heart,—Clara Toll is for me, and I am for her! She is calm and quiet, and with her my longing

will gradually become calm and quiet. Yes—yes, and in fact I have some love for Clara Toll.”

And he murmured several times, like some one learning a thing by heart: “Clara Toll—Clara Toll.”

Then he thought he had come to the end of his survey.

CHAPTER XI

ANOTHER BETROTHAL

It was gradually growing dark when a non-commissioned officer entered the cell and told Hann that he was free to go. He led Hann across the courtyard, exchanged a few words secretly with the sentry at the gate, which then groaned on its hinges, and Hann found himself in the dark street.

Breathing deeply, he put his hand to his head. He had lived through quite a number of experiences there. What was the last? Oh, of course, women, and especially Clara Toll—yes, her especially.

Then a hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned round, surprised, and saw his brother Paul; and behind him—who was the tall girl with the shawl over her head and the basket on her arm? Could it be? No. Hann's heart began to beat, and as the figure came nearer he recognised that it was the schoolmaster's daughter.

His head sank.

They were then the only ones who sympathised with his fate?

Paul looked very serious. But all the same he patted Hann gently on the back, and remarked that the prisoner could not have found it particularly pleasant within those walls.

It must be a joke with which the student hoped to help the fisherman over his embarrassment, but when Hann agreed with a good-tempered laugh, Paul, offended, drew his hand back. He did not regard the interlude as a joke. "It is not specially to our credit that things should have so happened with you, but—h'm"—he saw his brother's innocent, troubled face—"but then it's not given to every one to help such things. Now, give me your hand. I only wanted to make sure that you had not taken it too much to heart. Good-bye, Hann."

Paul gave him an encouraging nod, and disappeared round the next corner.

Hann was alone with the girl by the barracks wall. Inside, a performer on the horn was practising signals in his room: "Lights out." Tarattata—tarattata!

The sound came softly, indistinctly. A few snow-flakes fell on them; the air had grown warmer, and it was fast getting dark.

Much embarrassed, Hann began at last. "Yes, yes, Clara, I never thought of it that way; it's not to my credit, certainly."

Lightly she stepped nearer, her eyes full of tears. "Oh, Hann, never mind about that. No one at home 'll think anything about it."

"That's true. Only the fine folk here do that, Bruno and—Lina."

"Well, let them."

"Yes."

And after some reflecting, he added, "Shall we be moving on?"

Slowly they left the walls behind them. They

vanished in the darkness, and with them something of the oppression which weighed on the lad.

The schoolmaster's daughter poked him gently in the side with her basket. She had brought him some sausage and some bread and a small flask of brandy. "Because I thought you would be very hungry, Hann."

"Oh, Clara, how kind of you!"

"There, take it."

The bread and sausage tasted most delicious, and the brandy made him feel warm and courageous. He stroked her arm gently as they walked along. "Clara, how kind of you!" he repeated.

She nodded at him and looked down.

"Then you're not angry with me because they locked me up?" he began again.

"Not in the least," she replied, "especially since old Kusemann told me that you're now free of serving."

"Yes, that's so," confirmed Hann, and drew himself up. "One of my feet is shorter than the other."

"And that you won't be sent to Africa."

"God forbid! I shall stay here."

"Yes, now you'll stay here," she said happily.

They tried to see each other, but in the darkness they could not discover much.

"Clara Toll," he murmured suddenly.

It sounded as if he had just remembered something.

"What did you say?" she inquired.

"Oh, nothing—I only want to arrange something before we take the train home. Give me your hand, Clara."

"Here, Hann."

They stood in front of the small, narrow, ill-lighted window of a goldsmith's shop. The philosopher looked attentively at the hand, and gave several confirmatory nods. "It's quite right—but now——"

He searched his pockets, but appeared not to find anything, and hesitated. "Too stupid—I wasn't prepared; but, Clara, perhaps you could lend me a few shillings?"

"With pleasure," she quickly assured him. "Here's a gold piece I always carry about with me. Is it enough?"

"Heavens, I've no experience in such things, but the man 'll know. Wait here a minute."

He entered the shop hesitatingly, and when after a little time had elapsed he came out again, he looked excited, and Clara noticed that he held a little case in his hand.

"You'll get two shillings back," he stammered, breathless, "here—and now come."

"Yes, but, Hann, what——"

"No, no, not here; when we're alone."

He quickly drew her on,—her heart began to beat, she did not know why,—until they reached the open, frozen road by the side of the stream. A cold wind was blowing, but Hann did not notice it, and hurried his companion along the path to the railway, to the only lamp, which from a high pole spread a miserable, uncertain light.

Here they had to wait.

"The train isn't in yet," said Clara Toll, who was beginning to feel anxious.

"No, but they're ringing the bell," returned Hann, confused; "don't you hear?"

"Yes."

"It'll only be five minutes now," he continued.

She nodded.

Hann supported himself against the lamp-post, his teeth chattered, it seemed as if he was standing in a rocking boat. All at once, he grasped Clara's hand.

"Goodness!" she shrieked in terror, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing—nothing—I only wanted to say you can see the lights! already," stuttered Hann.

"Yes, there they are."

"Clara?"

"Yes."

"Who knows how many people there may be in the carriage? Won't you look what's in the case?"

He handed it to her with trembling hand, and she cast a half glance at it. In the uncertain light she saw a red gold spark.

"Gracious Heaven!" she exclaimed, and clasped her hands.

He held more firmly to the post and murmured, "I should be very glad if you'd accept it from me—and—and now we must get in."

Then the girl seized the post, and they stood like children about to play round and round the mulberry bush.

"Hann," she whispered in her pleasant-sounding voice, "tell the truth, do you care for me?"

The lad hesitated, and began twice before he could find the right word. "I like you very, very much, Clara, because—yes, because you're so kind and calm—— And you?"

"I——?" She blushed and plucked at her basket. "I care for you very much, Hann, because you are so true and honourable."

"Oh, Clara, that's splendid of you—that's—I had really not thought it possible, because I'm such a good-for-nothing, but from now on I'll try to do better, so accept the ring—no, I shan't kiss you; that's not proper in the street, and here comes the train."

He awkwardly attempted to help her into the carriage in knightly fashion; it was quite empty, and as the train jolted through the darkness, he bent down to her and said solemnly and seriously, "Now I kiss you, Clara, as my future wife."

Trembling, she raised her lips to his. Both were silent.

And only after some time had passed did Hann find courage to say, "And I owe you eighteen shillings."

She felt for his hand, but he did not see her red trembling lips, her pretty lifted face—no, with his philosophical spirit, he said thoughtfully, "It's awfully funny, Clara, that I should be engaged to you."

"Oh, Hann!"

He continued. "Yes, yes—can I do anything for you? I only meant that. The train is stopping. Come, Clara, the snow's very deep here, I'll lift you down."

CHAPTER XII

YOUNG LOVE AND THE SPRING

HOLLANDER, the Consul, perceived that spring had come when his new agent, Bruno, appeared at the office in an elegant light grey spring suit.

"What, sir!" shouted Hollander satirically, "another new and beautiful garment! Is it from your own design? You must give me your tailor's address."

Spring announced its advent also to Fräulein Dewitz. A man from Kroll's, the wine-merchant, presented himself in the sewing-mistress's kitchen and delivered to the astonished old dame ten bottles of wine,¹ which Bruno had specially ordered in her honour. On the card that accompanied them there might be read: "that the sender, if he did not fear it might put Fräulein Dewitz out, would very much like permission to spend the evening of the first of May in her comfortable parlour, as a last echo of the reading evenings which Fräulein Dewitz had so skillfully conducted."

"Look—look," and the sewing-mistress cleared her throat gratefully and approvingly after reading the missive, throwing a swift glance at the row of bottles

¹ Really the German *Maibowle*, a simple wine-cup flavoured with the herb woodruff, and very generally drunk by Germans in May.

to see if there were really ten of them,—“look—look—it’s all right. Herr Bruno is really—Heavens, how shall I put it?—like a gentleman of the *ancien régime*. Lina, I am always wondering why you behave so badly to him. It seems to me as if you purposely try to annoy him. Yet it was he who discovered how beautifully you could read aloud, and instead of giving himself up to frivolous pleasures like other young men, he joined in these pleasant and instructing reading evenings with us. I, at least—yes, I shall always think of you two as Louise and Ferdinand. When you read, ‘Heaven and Ferdinand tear at my heart,’—you did indeed move me.”

Lina listened quietly to the good old dame, and nodded in agreement, but an ambiguous smile played about her lips.

Oh, she was clever! She often thought that she must be a little black witch who could harm men by murmuring spells. And what pleasure it all was! What a sensation of well-being and comfort ran through her whole body! Oh, she knew better what brought handsome Bruno so often, so constantly, up Fräulein Dewitz’s narrow staircase. The kiss—and a burning kiss, too—and she laughed slyly—which she would have denied if any one had reminded her of it—for it was stolen from her in sleep. It—yes, it alone was the powerful magician’s seal which was impressed on the volatile youth, and burnt into his mind and heart until his thoughts were filled with nothing but her name. Lina—Lina—and never Dina. Ah! she was her deadly enemy. But, gently, gently; she knew how nets must be cast—she wasn’t a fisherman’s

daughter for nothing—and the other, she was only a stupid, cold-blooded, money-bag princess. No, she couldn't bewitch a man, lead him into all sorts of madness, torture him, and make him happy again, and then torture him again, just as things must go, till you were quite sure of him. And wasn't he already half in her possession?

Oh, if Dina—if even Fräulein Dewitz had the faintest notion to what follies she had already led Bruno! But softly—softly—quietly, so that no one should hear. In a drawer in her wardrobe, securely hidden, lay all sorts of rings, bracelets, and necklaces of red garnets which she enjoyed seeing at night in the mirror shine on her white skin, and girdles with stones of various colours; but the most beautiful of all was a tiny little glass box full of gold pieces—there were certainly fifteen of them—which, when she was alone, she often let run through her fingers.

He had brought it all secretly, piece by piece, just whenever she had treated him badly, snappishly, pretending to have absolutely no comprehension of what made him so restless, and slipping away from him like a gliding snake. Yes, her witch-like means would soon have an effect.

In Moorluke, too, love affairs were in the air. A few months after Hann's establishment as a fisherman—they were already carrying on their fishing diligently—Siebenbrod, one Sunday morning, while he carefully greased a new pair of waterproof boots, had the following conversation with his wife, who sat hymn-

book on lap, because her swollen feet did not permit her to go to church any more.

"Mother, do you know what?—things aren't quite right with Hann."

The little woman let her book drop.

"What do you mean, Siebenbrod?"

"It's something to do with love," continued Siebenbrod, pouring a large quantity of grease on to the leather,—“he sings.”

"Hann? What does he sing?"

"Sad songs, like 'Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten,'¹ and other things. Yes, it's come as far as that, I know."

"But, God in heaven, whom do you think it is?"

"It must be one of the schoolmaster's girls. I don't know which. It's all the same to me. But I've noticed for some time that Toll the schoolmaster always treats me to beer and that he sent you a pot of honey; it's all in vain—for I'm the only one that he hasn't yet disputed with over his new insurance against hail. Yes, mother, I've got a word to say in the business."

"You?"

Mother was frightened, and stared at the fisherman with her unchanging expression, who, undisturbed and calm, went on greasing his boot.

"Yes, mother," he growled at last, while much pleased he smelt at the leather; "don't look so astonished. Now we've got a little together, Toll thinks, old wiseacre as he is, 'Now I might get off one of my girls.' But wait! If he doesn't give

¹ The first line of Heine's "Lorelei."

Hann a few hundred thalers as a dowry, so that I can build a motor-boat, then I shan't allow Hann any share in my fishing patent, and he can't live only on love. We haven't lived only on love, have we?"

The lovers in question never suspected this outside gossip, and indeed without it their approach to closer intimacy was slow and hesitating. For Hann was a very gloomy lover. Whether he felt an overwhelming shyness in face of the girl's calm beauty and her evident desire for more outward expression of affection, or whether something he could not express weighed on him, he often looked at her when they stood together of an evening in the twilight by the parapet with such an astonished, seeking look, as if he was always wondering afresh that fate should have brought them together. He rarely ventured to stroke her hand, he had altogether ceased from caresses since their betrothal evening, and yet when they leaned side by side on the parapet, or wandered through the misty meadows by the sea in the darkness, such a quiet, peaceful calm surrounded them that all wishes and hopes seemed as if sunk into a beneficent slumber.

In the twilight—for in the daytime they did not venture to go about together—they often stood at the end of the harbour pier and looked at the trembling waters under their evening veil into which the moon seemed to throw millions of floundering goldfish.

Then Clara Toll with her thoughtful eyes would gaze far out to where the darkness and the sea mingled, and would say dreamily, "Look, Hann, there behind the water you can't see anything more.

And yet there's land there. It's just like that with our life."

It was now so dark that the philosopher felt immensely more comfortable. He pressed her hand gently, and while the west wind began to rustle, Clara leaned her head lightly against his shoulder. It was the first time it had happened, and Hann stood immovable.

The night sank down darker and more protectingly over them, and Hann's old friend, the moon, laughed straight down on the two.

The fisherman heaved a deep breath and tried hesitatingly to stroke the girl's hair with his big fingers. She looked up at him, quietly smiling in the uncertain moonlight.

"Clara," began Hann, continuing the stroking, and something came from his heart that had long filled him with shame, "I'm going to tell our parents how things are with us, for this secrecy is not good for you."

His words appeared to please her, and yet she slowly shook her head.

"No, don't," she decided at last, and gently stroked his cheek. "Not yet."

"But why not?"

Again she hesitated, and stroked his hand. "Because—because it's better, not yet—it's such a short time. Do you hear?"

He could not understand this refusal, which Clara had already often made. "Yes, but," he stuttered, "will you never explain to me why——"

He interrupted himself, for the girl again leaned

her head against his shoulder and put her hand before his mouth, so that he could not ask any more.

"I'll explain one day," she assured him,—“soon, perhaps, maybe very soon.”

It was incomprehensible to him, and he had not the least idea what fine feeling it was that influenced his betrothed's decision. For she was a thoughtful creature. And he received many curious proofs of that fact.

Meanwhile Whitsuntide had come. The meadows by the sea sparkled with dewdrops and yellow ox-eyed daisies. The land breeze carried the scent of the moor over the heaving sea. On the first holiday, when Hann strode through the tall waving grass, he discovered in a spot that shelved down to the Bodden, between the pebbles of the shore and the heath blossom, a brown head peeping forth.

He recognised it, and stopped short.

She sat with her back to him, splashing with her naked feet in the running water, and while her hands rested quietly in her lap, she carelessly hummed a verse of a song—

“Where loud the mill-wheel roareth,
Amid the flashing foam,
The maid my heart adoreth
Had there her olden home.”

The bulrushes behind her bent down and sang with her in their own way.

“Extraordinary!” thought Hann. He had often sat with Lina close by this place. A rolling pebble betrayed him.

The singer rose, and slowly approached him. She did not seem to remember that her feet were bare.

Both stretched out their hands. As they greeted each other, a peal sounded from the church tower. The Whitsuntide bells began to ring. And they rang out so solemnly in the sunny morning air and over the calm sea, that every word would have been a disturbance.

The two children of Nature felt it so. They held each other's hands in silence for a long time. And as the sound of the bells grew clearer and more ringing, something wonderful happened.

With a clumsy movement Clara slung her arms round the lad's neck, he saw her red lips come closer and closer to his, and then he felt a long, long kiss.

He was strangely dreamy, quite different from usual. The happiness he had so long thought about seemed to have come to him.

So it was some time before he noticed how seriously the girl was looking at him. So earnestly, so——

"Clara," said he quickly, "why do you look at me so?"

"Hann, I want to know something."

He nodded.

"Have you ever had anything to do with another girl?"

Hann bent down, and could not help seeing the very place where he and Lina had sat together.

He nodded curtly.

"Lina?" asked Clara.

He nodded again.

She continued to look at him, then raised herself on her toes, and offered him her mouth again.

It was all so soft and gentle.

"Clara!" he stammered, as if ashamed.

"Now, I must go to church." They parted, and she continued to nod at him as she slowly went from him.

He looked after her.

When the white, glistening feet had long vanished in the grass, he lay down in the place she had abandoned, thoughtfully propped up his head, and listened to the rustling and sighing of the wind. The seagulls as they flew past him chirped loudly, and he felt compelled to take up his sweetheart's song: how did it go?

"Death, of the friends I number
The kindest and best,
In thee the wronged ones slumber,
In thee the weary rest."

Wonderful! He let his head sink in his hands. "What is happiness, then?" And the Whitsun bells pealed around him.

CHAPTER XIII

LINA'S WITCHERY SUCCEEDS

BRUNO, sitting that same Whitsunday morning in one of the Consul's offices, looking through the correspondence, was busied with similar thoughts, only in a far more excited fashion. There is always something strange and forbidding about a large empty room to the lonely occupier of it, but the young agent scarcely needed that circumstance to stimulate his imagination.

He had just read the report of one of the American agents of the house, a man not much his elder, who had been in Hollander's employ, had later married a rich wife in New York, and was now working independently for himself. And what enormous sums of money of his own he must have now! The figures whirled through Bruno's head; he gazed into space with shining eyes, and then suddenly uttered a loud sigh. The echo of it frightened him when he heard it through the empty room, but his thoughts hurried on.

What about himself? Notwithstanding his good position, the Consul did not remunerate him very highly, and with the sum he earned—in this lonely hour he must confess the truth that he always tried to overlook—his expenditure was always in

excess of his income. The life that filled his imagination did not agree with the reality. If the Consul had any idea of that! Or if he had known the reason, the mad, insane reason, that urged his confidential agent to such boyish escapades! Were they merely the soon forgotten escapades of youth?

Bruno jumped up, crossed over to the window, looked at the passers-by, tried to hum the verse of a song; but the picture he had conjured up, the picture of a dark brown witch, who measured him with her black mocking eyes and cherry lips, did not quickly fade.

His heart began to beat violently, as wildly, as incessantly, as when he was with her. Great God! what did he want of her? He started when he thought of it as if a madness had seized on him, as if a single wicked desire ruled him, was all-powerful over him, and made him wretched.

"Such wickedness—such wickedness!" he murmured, pressing his hands against his temples. And yet what indescribable good luck it was that the creature slid through his hands like a snake, that she was wise, and he would never reach his wicked goal! For it would never do; he was determined, absolutely determined, in spite of all, not to spoil his future, but to become great and yet greater, a great manufacturer, such as this northern province had only once seen in the glorious years of its foundation. And when the golden soil was ready, who could say what enchanted trees heavy with blossom might not spring up? Perhaps even the woman, the

slender, alluring kitten whose purring excited him, whose mere name inflamed his thoughts, and for the sake of whose black eyes, filled with desire, he secretly made an outlay which was threatening to shake the foundations of his existence.

No, no, he must put this exciting passion out of his head—a passion which could lead to nothing and only cause indescribable misery; and with the sudden energy of imaginative natures he pulled himself erect in the arm-chair in front of his writing-table, and had quite resolved not to see Fräulein Dewitz's narrow staircase and shining parlour for many a long month to come.

But how could he quickest pay the debts he owed to certain jewellers in the town—debts made to pander to Lina's delight in glittering gold ornaments? What an eager, childish smile lighted her face when she received such things! In absolute despair, he unfolded a financial paper and began to read the quotations. Speculation? He started.

How many men on the Hamburg Stock Exchange had become enormously rich in a few days, often scrupulous fellows who the day before had not possessed a farthing!

Once more his heart beat fast. His imagination was caught. But unfortunately—unfortunately, the way was not accessible to him. First there was his own want of means, and then the honourable house of Hollander. Yet success was only to the bold, and had not his sagacious conclusions astonished those of his Hamburg friends who had taken his suggestions?

But no, no, the Philistine respectability of the

house bound him down ; he must bid farewell to the thought.

While he hopelessly took in the rows of figures, he heard a carriage drive by below. It was occupied by Dina, who for some days had taken her drive at that hour. She did not cast a look up at his window.

Yes, it had been most foolish of him to neglect the proud heiress all the winter, bewitched as he had been by his unsatisfied desire. But that could be remedied. Dina had liked talking over the newest literature with him. Yes, he would procure some books, he would—— He heard footsteps in the Consul's private office next door, and Bruno distinguished the voices of his chief and of his friend Knabe, the Tax Commissioner. It was curious. To-day—on a holiday? And what a happy talk they seemed to be having! Bruno could distinctly hear Hollander's loud laugh and the old bachelor's quiet giggle. Then a bell was rung, a servant appeared, went away, returned, and Bruno, getting nearer to the wall, heard the two men whisper. Then—a sound which could only proceed from the popping of a champagne cork ; and then the listener discovered that Hollander's big head was close behind the clouded glass of the door, as if he wanted to spy out what his subordinate was doing. What could it mean?

Bruno was seized with a violent, gnawing anxiety. He blamed himself for being such a fool, but it seemed to him as if all the laughing and whispering and clinking of glasses in there had to do with him alone—as if he were being directly held up to scorn. The blood mounted to his face, half mechanically he

bent over his writing-table, and made all sorts of wild calculations on a sheet of paper.

"Klüth," said the Consul, who suddenly stood behind him, holding a glass of champagne, "you're an industrious fellow,—all respect to you,—but here, take this——" therewith handing him the glass. "Do you like this sort of thing—*Rocderer carte blanche*—do you like it, eh? Now listen, I ask you here plainly before the Tax Commissioner: What do you think of Harder & Co. of Hamburg?"

Bruno stared at the ground and tried to collect his thoughts, but he failed to understand why the cunning old man let himself go like this. He stammered out something to the effect that the house was one of the first shipping firms in Germany, and at the moment the Consul's most dangerous competitor.

"Do you hear, Julius?" and, greatly pleased, Hollander turned to his friend, while he patted his agent kindly on the shoulder. "Klüth and I, we're always of the same opinion." And suddenly he drank off a glass of champagne, poked his subordinate cheerfully in the ribs, and whispered, with a wink of the eye, "Don't mention it to any one, Klüth, but young Harder has been a week here in the town—do you understand?—and last evening my daughter Dina was betrothed to him. Now, my dear fellow, what do you say to that? Good business, eh?"

And he shouted to the Tax Commissioner, "Just look at Klüth! He's grown quite pale over this joining up of forces. Yes, he's a great admirer of my methods. But drink away, Klüth, drink away."

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How and when he left the office, Bruno had not the least idea. Only when loud military music greeted his ear did he discover, to his amazement, that in his absorption he had reached the market-place, where the band always played at noon. Around him, on all the four sides of the square, lounged troops of brightly-dressed girls, accompanied by students in their gay-coloured caps, officers, young clerks; in short, during this one hour of a Sunday the respectable ancient town gave itself up to frivolity. But the glad trumpets and the gay crowds seemed to hurt the good-looking young man, on whom the girls threw approving glances.

Not entirely free from narrow superstition, his mind was impressed with the idea that some hostile power was hindering his advancement—that he was not destined to attain success. What could it be? It could not be true.

Close beside him he heard involuntarily a curious whispering and muttering. When he raised his head, he saw that a group of red-capped students were looking admiringly at two ladies who were passing, in whom Bruno immediately recognised Fräulein Dewitz and Lina.

For one brief moment he felt how Lina's eyes flashed, then yielding to a strong impulse, he turned to the nearest shop window, and mirrored in a shadowy fashion in the bright glass he saw her form as in a picture, looking most charming in a simple red cotton frock that made her appear quite different from all the other girls.

Bruno looked after them. Then she turned her

head towards him. She seemed to mock him and to shrug her shoulders. Was that his fate?

The waltz music clashed out louder and louder, when Bruno discovered that he had stopped before the window of the very jeweller to whom he was so deeply in debt. He was hurrying away when the owner, who was enjoying the concert at the open shop-door, spoke to him politely and invited him in.

"Yes—but——"

Oh, there was no need for him to buy anything, but he had a few Russian designs ready, and as Herr Klüth was so greatly interested in such things——

The young man had the disagreeable feeling that the shopkeeper was already suspicious, and with the delusion of all in his circumstances, that it helped to keep up appearances, he entered the shop with an air of indifference and confidence. While, in his semi-bewilderment, all sorts of gold ornaments passed through his hands, he determined not to be tempted by the glittering baubles—every fresh purchase would mean a half-deceit.

"What is that?"

"A chain for a fan," the attendant explained; "it is slung round the hips—so."

Bruno smiled: as if under an enchanter's wand he saw Lina in his mind's eye as she swayed her lithe form. How well the golden girdle would look round her young limbs! And if he could only put it on her himself! Suddenly he felt as if a gust of wind had blown away all anxiety, all consideration. He looked round with clear eyes, as if he only now understood where he was and what had happened.

Ridiculous—quite ridiculous! Because he found this particular bridge broken which crossed the stream beyond which his future stretched—therefore bewilderment, despair? Ridiculous! Was he not man enough to build three new bridges? Yes, he would venture it—his chief and the rest should see; and he would not forego the smallest pleasure, not even Lina. A man had only one life.

With haste, as if he meant to steal it, he caught up the jewel-case, and only when he was in the street did he remember that he had actually forgotten to ask the price. Well, another time. Now to the tavern!

He sat in Kroll's half-dark guest-room till late in the afternoon. A single gas jet shone down on the brown oak table. He blew the smoke of a fine cigar out of his way, and excitedly watched several land-owners of the neighbourhood who were playing cards. One of them, a tall fair man, whom the rest addressed as Captain, was his man. He put his faith in his cards, and when, after some losses, the Captain at length put a couple of bank-notes into his waistcoat pocket, the agent's eyes began to shine, and he breathed deep and freely.

Yes, of course—of course; the goal was never to the faint-hearted.

The little clock between the portraits of the two emperors struck seven. If he meant to go to Fräulein Dewitz's, it was high time. He knew that the old lady had supper at eight, and was not generous with her invitations. So he must hurry.

It was only a joke, an innocent pastime, and as

Fräulein Dewitz was always present, it was also a self-denying pleasure. So further consideration was needless. While he handed the waiter a generous tip he looked back at the room. He saw that the Captain held a new bank-note between his fingers.

"Thank God!" he thought, and slashed the air with his walking-stick as soon as he was in the street, as if he had just laid low an enemy. "I say that all these doubts savour of a little provincial town."

The bell rang. Something moved behind the red curtains of the glass door, and the visitor saw Lina's dark head spy through it. She carefully opened it a little way.

"Who is it?" she asked, for the ill-lighted staircase prevented her recognising anything. Otherwise she was not so timorous.

"It's me," answered Bruno.

"Oh, only you?" she remarked, stepping back and taking a small lamp from the wall to light the way. "Come in."

When he stood close to her, in his fashionable dark overcoat and high hat, she laughed out loudly. Bruno started. Such noise was unusual in the old maid's shining abode, in which Lina generally only ventured to move quietly on tiptoe. Fräulein Dewitz would be ruffled by it. And in surprise Bruno peeped into the parlour, through the half-opened door, expecting the old lady to step out in all her dignity. Lina seemed to read his thoughts.

"No," she said, "she's not there."

"Not there?"

"No; she's at the Consul's. Only the greatest friends were invited to the betrothal."

Bruno was terrified. The blood mounted to his face. He felt ashamed, as if the words were purposely directed at him. Meanwhile Lina had preceded him into the room. A tall china lamp burned on the table, and its light made the floor, mirror, and chairs shine again.

"Come in," said Lina invitingly to her hesitating guest. He stood undecided, and asked if he really might come in despite the old lady's absence; but Lina looked at him in surprise.

"Of course—it's delightful that she's away at last. Oh, this being watched continually!"

She stood before the mirror in her red frock, swaying slightly to and fro, and regarded her image in the glass.

Her manner was so strange that Bruno felt with secret fear how hotly his blood began to run through all his veins. He quickly took off his overcoat—perhaps that was the reason.

"That's right," nodded Lina, all the while smiling at her image in the glass. "You shall have supper directly."

"With you?" He did not venture to sit down or to go on looking at her in the shining glass. "Won't Fräulein Dewitz——" he asked.

"She won't know anything about it. That's all the nicer. I shall wash up all the plates after and put everything away. It's so nice to have such a secret, isn't it?"

So saying, she looked at him sideways, and fumbled

at the receptacle beneath the glass, whence as from a hiding-place she drew forth a book. She offered it him stealthily.

"See, there are plenty of such stories in it. Other people are even cleverer."

When Bruno turned over the leaves, he found it to be a translation of Maupassant's short stories.

"Do you read such things?" he asked, restraining himself.

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Fräulein Dewitz lets you?"

Lina pulled at her waist and smoothed her hips. "She?" she said, with a contemptuous movement. "What do you suppose she reads? Travels. But when I go and change for her, I always get something of the sort in secret, and hide it here. The book only costs a penny, and I've got the money. You know how. Ah! it's lovely to have so much money."

And she pressed her hands together and stretched out her arms, and Bruno's fixed look was again attracted by the rising and falling of her breast.

"Go—go," flew through his head, and his hand touched his overcoat, which lay near him on the back of the sofa.

Lina turned to him and tapped the table.

"You're so quiet," she said in surprise.

He said nothing, and saw that she passed her finger over the smooth surface of the wood.

"What's the matter with you? Do say something. Ah! I know—it's because of Dina."

She stepped back into the centre of the room, spread out her fingers as if she meant to scratch, and

something like the fire of victory shone in her dark eyes. Her whole attitude seemed to celebrate a wild triumph.

"Yes," she said, and smiled spitefully at her visitor, "she's shown herself no fool."

He raised his head as if to ask what she meant, but not a syllable escaped from the tightly pressed lips. More and more he felt himself in that condition of bewilderment in which he lost all his self-control.

"Go—go," something again bade him. Lina once more stood in front of the mirror.

"Do you know him?" she inquired, half looking back at him over her shoulder.

"I? Whom?"

"The bridegroom?"

"Yes."

"Rich?"

"A millionaire."

"Ah!" Here she put her flat hands over her eyes, as if so she could better absorb herself in the splendour of the pictures that passed through her mind.

"Has he got a carriage?" she asked quickly, without moving.

"Yes."

"And—and men-servants?"

"Of course."

"And—tell me—a fine house?"

"Certainly—a villa in Uhlenhorst, close to the Alster." She muttered; then it almost sounded as if she softly groaned.

"That all that should be for such a silly goose!"

escaped from her lips. And turning passionately to him she added, "And does a marble staircase lead from the house down to the water? Don't laugh. I want to know."

"I'm not laughing," he returned, keeping his temper; for her desire for the wealth he could not offer her irritated him. "But why all this?"

Longingly her black eyes looked at the dull glass of the lamp shade, and almost unconsciously she said to herself, "When they go down at night, ah!——"

"Lina," he whispered, and slowly stood up.

The sound brought her to herself, and, surprised, as if now forced to remember him, she looked at him, and before that strange glance his courage again forsook him.

"What do you want?" she asked, protesting.

"I?"

In his confusion no indifferent words occurred to him.

"You'd like to have all that?" he brought out at last with difficulty. "The carriage, and the servants, and the villa, and—and all the rest? Wouldn't you?"

Then an almost hostile gleam appeared in her black eyes, as she drew herself up and angrily replied that you couldn't tell, perhaps she would get all that too. Maupassant described girls who had nothing but their beauty, and who in the end drove in their own carriages. "It's quite possible, now, isn't it?"

She turned round a little in front of the mirror, and put her fingers in expectation to her lips. Alas! it

was this desire for adventure which found so strong an echo in him—this vagabond's blood which called so loudly in both the young people—it was that which did not allow them to draw away from each other. Her desire, her longing for money and a life of luxury infected him at the moment, and with an eager step he went up to her and pressed her hand.

"You're right, Lina. If we've only courage, we can attain everything—everything."

"Yes, yes, isn't it so?" she said, much pleased, and looked at him almost affectionately.

Both were now silent for a space; each looked searchingly into the other's eyes, as if waiting for the other to speak the word that would remove this oppressive load.

But for the moment fear prevailed. At last, with a line of discouragement between her eyebrows, Lina slowly turned away, shrugged her shoulders, snapped her fingers, hummed something, and ran into the kitchen.

Bruno was alone. When he reflected, everything oppressed him. The Philistine orderliness of the room, the faded portrait of the sewing-mistress that hung over the sofa, and then, suddenly he felt in his pocket the case with the gold chain. An overwhelming shame came upon him; involuntarily he thought of Paul; who was certainly sitting in his bare room, studying, and thinking anxiously about him and the girl.

If Paul knew! If he knew that his younger brother ministered to the foolish desires of a young girl!—that he had filled her drawers with all sorts of

ornaments—that he had a new one ready for her, and was considering how he could put it on her now she was alone! No, no, by Heaven! The perspiration stood on his forehead. “Go—go.”

A noise of plates and dishes sounded from the kitchen. He made a dash at his overcoat, when he heard her light step, and before he could throw the garment into the alcove whence, lying half in shadow, the white covered beds appeared, she stood before him.

“What are you doing with your coat?” she asked quickly.

Embarrassed, he shrugged his shoulders, and gazed uncertainly at Lina as she stood behind him, carrying a tray full of dishes. And then he became aware how sharply the black silk apron which she now wore stood out from the red frock.

He pulled himself together and forced a smile. His easy outlook on life came over him of a sudden—he offered to help lay the table.

“No,” she refused rudely, and pushed him away with her elbows. “First this.”

And when she had set down her tray, she walked quickly to the alcove and banged the door. The noise echoed throughout the flat.

“What are you doing?” he asked in terror. “It’ll be heard all over the building.”

“Well,” she replied haughtily, “we’ve nothing to fear.”

Again he had to cast down his eyes and conceal his embarrassment, while with a joking word he arranged the dishes. But Lina’s delight in this secret

hostess-ship soon drove away her ill-humour and made her quite cheerful.

"Oh, it's too delightful," she called across to Bruno, "to have something in secret of one's very own—and that"—she suddenly stroked his hand affectionately, kittenlike—"I have, thanks to you. Just look!"

She sprang to her wardrobe, threw out all sorts of underclothes, and then the hidden treasures appeared in all their glory.

"Lina," he cried, with rising shame, for the sight of these gifts was unpleasant to him, "shan't we sit down? It's half-past eight, and I can only stop a little while."

But she was too much in her element. No, to honour him, she must first decorate herself with all his gifts. "Just see, the opal earrings,"—she dragged herself on her knees up to him,—"you must put them in for me—so. And here's the bracelet, and the diamond heart—what a pity that ought to be worn with a low bodice!"

She had put on everything, shook her arms, bent her neck, and then quickly sat down beside him on the sofa. In busy haste she began to butter rolls for him, always endeavouring to turn her fingers so that the rings sparkled in the lamp-light.

"Do you like it?" she asked, with a swift side-glance.

He looked admiringly at her, and felt his self-control fast ebbing.

They drank the hot tea, and in their lover-like preoccupation allowed themselves to indulge in flights of fancy about the future. Here he was her superior,

her master. She sat reverently beside him, her hands folded, her mouth slightly open in admiration, and her pretty white teeth urged him to ever more extravagant flights. She saw all her hopes take shape—the carriage, the servants, the country house, and everything submitted to his will—and soon also to hers—soon also——

Suddenly she screamed. He ceased to talk about the country house, confused words fell from him. "You're the loveliest—you're the loveliest!"

In her first terror she ran into the centre of the room, but he came up with her by the mirror. She turned her back to him as if she was angry, but he saw in the glass that her eyes watched him half in expectation, half imploringly.

Then he suddenly remembered the chain. With a suppressed cry he pulled it out, and always muttering, "You're the loveliest!" lifting his arms, he put the gold girdle over her head.

She stood there with large terrified eyes. He had never before dared such a thing. She began to tremble under his hands as if shaken by fever. A stupefying storm wind raged about them. In expectation, quiet, without moving, she allowed him to press mad, wild kisses on her neck, and it was as if she counted the ticking of the little clock on the wall. One—two—three—four.

"You're the loveliest!" she heard. And the sound of the human voice dashed everything into ruins. With a fierce strength, she tore off the chain, that fell broken to the ground with a clatter; and how frightened he felt when he became aware of

the white face in which only the red lips testified to life!

It was very strange how she now slowly and deliberately walked up to him, and said in a trembling voice, while her eyes glowed darkly and tried to penetrate his meaning: "I'm not such an one as you perhaps think. You mustn't believe that. I tell you I have cared for you for a long while, but I know what I want. If you don't mean honourably towards me, then let me go my own way alone. I shall reach the heights without you—do you understand?"

Her voice had a threatening sound. The clock again ticked loudly. One—two—three—four. And with every stroke the calculating good sense of these two people increased.

"Well, answer," she urged sharply. But he stood as if paralysed. The thought that had ruled his whole life, that he must consider his future, that he must seize every aid to success, marry a rich wife, and turn aside neither to the right nor to the left, rose giant-like before him, and held him fast. He writhed as if in bodily pain.

She possessed the witch-like art of reading his thoughts in his face.

"Fie!" she shouted.

The delicate limbs under the red garment seemed seized with anger, and the girl resembled a flowering thorn bush lashed by the storm. Much taken aback, Bruno saw her crumple up as it were, violently pull her dress closer round her, and sobbing with rage and shame, rush to the alcove.

That was just the push that the man bending over

the precipice needed. When he saw her magnificent wild movements, her raging anger, the witch had accomplished her work. How it happened he never knew, but he held his arms round her and implored her not to cry, he would do everything that she wished—all and everything.

"Yes?" she asked, smiling triumphantly through her tears, and freeing herself from his clasp.

"Yes."

"Then give me the ring you're wearing."

He quickly put the ring on her finger.

"What more?"

"Swear that you'll never forsake me."

"No, never."

"Not like that, but in the presence of our mother, out at Moorluke, you shall do it."

In trembling anxiety he repeated the words after her.

When the last syllable had sounded she retreated a step as if to make sure, and then suddenly, with a shrill cry, she threw herself wildly on his breast, clasping her arms round his neck.

BOOK III

PHILOSOPHY AND LOVE



CHAPTER I

THE STORM

THE harbour lay wrapped in peaceful slumber. The pilot and Hann sat on the edge of the pier-head and fished. And every moment Kusemann, with a sly glance, brought a struggling fish out of the water and slipped it carefully into a bucket which stood behind him.

"Fifteen," he counted beamingly.

Now Hann knew quite well that it was only the tenth, but he did not attempt to contradict his old comrade.

"How do you manage it?" he asked after some time, as he gazed thoughtfully at the glittering heap.

"Can't you hear?" answered old Kusemann proudly. "I whistle!"

Hann smiled as a hissing sound came from between the old man's teeth.

"So that's why they rise?" he asked slowly.

"Oh, well, as long as they are on the feed, they'll rise! But there is an art in it. You watch!"

He stuck a fresh worm on the hook, spat on it, and when he had thrown out the line, waited for the float to bob.

He then whistled, and instantly drew up a fine three-pounder.

"What do you say to that?" he asked triumphantly, and patted his companion on the back.

And again Hann laughed at the old man's simple skill.

"Splendid!" he said approvingly.

"Now look!" grunted old Kusemann, feeling much pleased with himself.

But their conversation did not get any farther.

Was it the heat shimmering on the water, or were Hann's thoughts far away? The pilot grunted with displeasure when his friend gradually let the rod drop on to his knee, and firmly fixed his eyes on a heavy white cloud that was rising, jagged and dazzling, on the blue horizon. Old Kusemann felt deeply hurt at this indifference,—not to care for fishing seemed to him a serious defect of character,—so he coughed a little, spat into the water, and moved restlessly, and when all these efforts proved of no avail, he grumbled to himself.

"Hann is no good. He does it over and over again. You wait a bit, my boy!" Suddenly, he waved his cap with all his might.

"Lina!" he yelled, as if possessed.

"Who?—Where?" gasped the dreamer, terrified.

"Yes, I was just thinking," said the old man, delighted at the success of his ruse, "what a pretty girl she was."

Hann looked at him, grew very red, dropped his head, and turned once more to his cloud.

"That acted like a thunderbolt," thought old

Kusemann, as silence fell again, "but I know he is a phi—something or other. I must find out what is the matter with him."

"Hann," he said deliberately, while he cut himself a quid of tobacco, "I know some one, and you know him too, who can whistle much better than I can. Do you know who it is?"

"No,"—the answer came listlessly.

"Your brother Bruno."

And the pilot, looking at the boy from under his eyelids, had the satisfaction of seeing that at last he had attracted his companion's attention.

"Why?" he asked awkwardly.

"My boy, I'm surprised you did not know that," the old man went on sociably. "I thought you must know how well he catches the pretty little struggling things. But if you can't remember, I'll willingly remind you. It's—yes, look here—about eight weeks ago, a few days after Whitsuntide, I was in the town one evening, at Bonhäse's my brother-in-law's, who keeps the public-house near the harbour. Now, you know how good-natured I am, and how easily I can be persuaded, and it's always difficult to resist relations! I had drunk a few glasses more than I ought,—out of pure good-nature, mind you,—and in case my wife might notice my breath afterwards, I thought I would go for a little stroll along the sea-wall, to get rid of the smell."

"Go on," Hann murmured, his eyes wide open and resting anxiously on his companion's face.

"All in good time," said old Kusemann calmly, looking carefully to his rod. "Everything in its turn,

as the fox said when he ate the chicken. Well, when I was walking in the dark under the trees—chestnuts always are devilish dark, curse them—whom should I see sitting on a bench but——”

“Bruno and Lina,” stammered Hann, whose face had turned a deep bronze.

“How well you guessed that!” said the pilot, with a delighted smile, smacking his lips, as if he were giving invisible kisses. “But they were in a great hurry, or else they would have noticed me, and some one else, who was standing in the shrubbery near the old wall and stretching his neck to watch them both—do you know who that was?”

Hann dropped his rod, and old Kusemann caught it in the nick of time.

“Do you know that too?” the lad stammered in alarm, while he took off his cap and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

“Yes,” said the pilot, as he brutally hooked a very long worm. “If you ever do that again, Hann, don’t put on the cap with the gold tassel. I know by experience—it gives you away!”

Hann stared at the narrator, and then turned and gazed gloomily into the water, through which he could distinctly see the furrows of golden sand. After a time he began to stammer out an explanation.

He had that evening been to the town, to deliver the herrings to the salter’s, and had suddenly caught sight of the pair in the far distance. He followed them in order to come up with them, and when he found them by the sea-wall, everything happened as

old Kusemann had said. He himself—Hann—had crept away unperceived under shelter of the wall.

"Perhaps they're engaged?" suggested the pilot craftily.

Hann did not dare to answer, but gazed perplexed into the water, where shoals of little fish were swimming up and down.

But old Kusemann was not going to let him off so easily.

"I hope, my boy, that he has told your parents of his intentions. Has he?"

"Yes," murmured Hann, almost unintelligibly, and wiped his forehead again. But guilt was written upon his face.

"So, it's like that, is it?" said old Kusemann, shutting his eyes and thoughtfully stroking his beard. "Yes, yes," he went on, blinking, "every one has his own way in these little affairs; one takes the girl on his knees, the other hides from her behind a fish-net! But stop! There's a bite!"

He was just going to throw the struggling fish into the pail, when he felt Hann's strong grip on his arm.

"Old Kusemann?"

"Yes."

"What you said just now?"

"Hann, let me go!"

"No, you must tell me first."

"Good Lord, what is there to tell, only that you've given my arm a good pinch! I've eyes to see when a gnat spits in the water; and when a few days after my story, Clara Toll passed by and you hid in a field behind the fishing-nets, so that she

had to go quietly home again—do you think I didn't see that?"

In the burning sun, Hann felt as if something like ice was trickling down his back. He moaned suddenly and buried his face in his hands.

"Yes, yes, I did do that."

"Why?"

"It's true, I wanted to get out of her way. It isn't right, but I can think of nothing else but those two. I can't help it. Old Kusemann, do you know why it is?"

"Yes, Hann, it's because you are a bit of a phi—something or other."

They were both silent for a while.

The water lapped softly under the hot sun, the smell of the sea-weed grew stronger, the clouds gathered in jagged banks on the horizon, and far in the distance could be heard the sound of rumbling thunder.

"There's a storm coming up," grunted the pilot, sniffing the smell of rain in the air. Hann gripped his arm again with both hands.

"You must promise me something."

"Of course—what is it?"

"Never to repeat what we've been talking about here to-day."

"Why should I? But see, Hann,"—and the pilot half shyly, half affectionately stroked the boy's knee,—
"your little Spitz had puppies the other day, if you would give me one of them it would help me to remember, for I'm very forgetful."

The rumbling grew louder over the water.

"It's coming up now," said old Kusemann, as the

fishermen lifted up their rods to wind up their lines. "Then I can call for the little dog?" And when Hann nodded silently, the pilot took the lad by the arm and growled, "It's for your sake, Hann, and you know it's right to let people have a keepsake. But come along, there will be a bad storm."

And there was a bad storm.

In the town, the forked lightning played over the roofs of the houses, and flashed in at the windows, hissing and whispering.

"Look, girl!" hissed the zigzag lightning, as it flashed into the window where Fräulein Dewitz and Lina were sitting, "there goes some one of whom you are thinking. You'll have to tell him—tell him—tell him. Soon, every one'll have to know—to know. Make haste!—sisch—whizz!"

And it struck the earth.

A long crackling sound ran through the streets, the houses tottered.

Lina turned as white as snow, but her eyes kept their sulky expression, as she turned her little dark head to nod unperceived at the young man on the other side of the street, who, in spite of the pouring rain, had raised his hat twice as he passed by. The action was significant—it was a signal.

"Look!" said Fräulein Dewitz, in trembling tones, who could not have moved her tightly clasped hands for the whole world. "What a well-bred young fellow he is! Even in this weather, he has taken off his cap to each of us. That is good manners, my child. My God! if it were only all over!"

A wild, uncertain smile rose to Lina's lips at those words. She was thankful to receive the sign from the passer-by, for it meant that at least one of Bruno's plans had turned out all right. But—but—what was he going to do?

She did not know. She had asked so often. But he was faithful to her. He had sworn it, and she knew how great was her power over him. That was the main point.

He was always so bright and hopeful; it was only the uncertainty of their future that made him restless and absent-minded.

But, thank God, he had given her his promise, and soon everything would be all right; it must be the close air that made her feel so depressed, for Fräulein Dewitz would not allow the window to be open.

The lightning rattled and played round the panes, a flash looked in at her through the rain: "You'll have to tell him—before every one knows—whizz!"

"What's the matter, Lina?" asked the old lady.

"Nothing—nothing, it's only the sultry air."

Yes, yes, if only the storm were over!

The Moorlukers stood by the parapet and said now that the old bridge was destroyed there was no longer any connection between Moorluke and the opposite village.

The rain pelted in torrents, and over land and sea hung a blue sulphurous light.

"That's bad," said Pagel, the dropsical pilot with the bandaged leg.

"Why?" asked Siebenbrod, and added up the expense in his head. "Some one can make a very good job out of the ferry."

"It's all very well," grumbled Toll, the lean, spindle-legged schoolmaster; "it would never have happened if the wretched thing had been insured—it would never have happened!"

Before they had had time to grasp this suggestion, there came suddenly, through the pelting rain and the howling wind, the sound of a concertina. It sounded as if some one was playing out on the water.

What was it?

"Good heavens! I hope it isn't Malljohann?" cried old Kusemann; "his boat is lying somewhere near here."

Through the crowd strode a tall big-boned woman—Frau Dolly Petersen—the female captain.

"My God! Why did he do it? Why did he do it?" she moaned, wringing her hands. "He always creeps on to the bridge in a storm, he says he must play against the thunder. What can I do?"

"Malljohann! Malljohann!" shouted three or four voices, to attract his attention.

"The man has such mad ideas in his head!" the woman lamented, and in despair bent over the parapet towards the broken bridge.

"Oh!" she cried suddenly; "look! oh, look! There's something sitting there, like his ghost. O God! O God! How frightened I am!"

They gathered round her, trying with eyes accustomed to the sea to pierce the clouds and

mist and rain which surrounded them like a grey fishing-net.

Over there—in the middle of the water—on the three remaining beams something brown was moving—and as the peals of thunder rattled over the misty meadows, they could distinguish a feeble sound.

“Oh, listen!” cried Frau Dolly,—“just listen! He’s playing ‘Who only lets God rule’—and how he plays!”

They all pushed forward and shouted to each other.

Could they throw out boards to meet the broken planks? But would they hold? Perhaps it would be better to throw a rope, but the fool could not catch it! Could they launch a boat in this whirlpool?

“I would have done it!” exclaimed old Kusemann. “I have saved the lives of four men!”

“Well done! Old Kusemann!” they cried in unison.

“But to-day is one of my lame days!” the pilot admitted.

“For he will be miraculously saved,” squeaked the concertina through the rain.

“Listen! Just listen!” cried the woman again.

“Hann!” shouted the pilot through the noise. “Where is Hann Klüth?”

“Here! What do you want with him? There he is, standing by the woman,” they answered.

The lad stood deep in thought, gazing at the broken bridge; the pilot laid his hand quietly on his shoulder.

"Hann, a man should help his neighbour, shouldn't he?"

But the schoolmaster, who feared for his future son-in-law, pushed between them, and cried excitedly—

"Men and women! This is all nonsense! He's only a madman!"

"A madman? What do you mean?" asked Hann Klüth, with his eyes on the ground. "Isn't he sitting on the only plank that is left, and in the midst of death playing a sacred hymn? If he is mad to do that, what would he do if he were sane? No, I've always thought we never understood him—and it's a great pity!"

With a quick movement he let himself down over the harbour-side into a boat that was already half full of rain-water.

A tall form clambered after him—Muchow, the deaf and dumb giant, who seemed to be enjoying the thing as a great joke.

"Hüh! hüh!" he cried excitedly, pointing at the bridge.

Scarcely was the boat unfastened, when it was dashed in a second, by the force of the waves, with cracked ribs, against the projecting beams. The next moment, Hann stood up, threw his arm round one of the posts, seized hold of the musician (who had watched all these efforts to save him with the greatest unconcern) by the legs and dragged him into the boat. Then he pushed off with all his might from the plank; the little boat rebounded and shot back, grinding on to the beach.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the Moorlukers.

The deaf and dumb man caught hold of the musician, lifted him high into the air, and tossed him like a sack to land.

Then, laughing with joy, he sprang after him. "Hüh—hü——" he gurgled. "Pancakes!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the Moorlukers again. "Now, Hann!"

But what was that? A scream of terror rose from many throats.

It was one huge wave, that tossed the boat into the air and dashed it down again keel upwards on the beach. Hann was thrown out head first, and struck his forehead against the spike of an iron anchor. In that last moment, it seemed to him as if the sun was setting, glowing and blood-red before him.

"Lina!" he groaned.

"Hann! Hann! Hann Klüth!"

"Now he's gone and done it!" said Siebenbrod. "The boy always was a fool. Now I shall have to pay the doctor's bill."

.
It was twilight.

They had laid him on his narrow bed in the garret. The women sat beside him.

His mother had been carried up in her chair by Siebenbrod, and now sat helplessly by his side, watching Clara Toll as she tended the outstretched figure and laid cool bandages on his head.

She could do nothing to help, the poor old mother with her swollen feet, but every time the silent girl reached to the basin she stroked her damp hand gently and murmured, "Dear daughter!"

It was depressingly quiet in the little darkened room. One could only hear the occasional splash of the water and Clara's deep, restrained breathing.

The window was open.

Outside the storm had subsided, and a fine drizzling rain was falling; but in the distance, behind the sodden fields, the red ball of the sun was sinking in a grey-blue mist. A light wind shook the damp poplars in front of the cottage, and all around was the smell of the hay and the sea.

An hour passed by.

Hann lay perfectly still, with wide-open staring eyes. He did not move when Clara Toll bent over him gently, and without fear or embarrassment before the old woman, pressed her lips upon his forehead.

"Dear daughter!" the old woman murmured again, and laid her hand on the girl's,— "dear daughter!"

Clara Toll turned and faced Hann's mother. Then she softly stroked the elder woman's smooth hair. The mother passed a shaking arm round the girl's waist and pressed her to her side. "You're the right one for him," she whispered after a time.

Meanwhile it grew darker and darker. The moon, surrounded by a misty halo, shed a dim light through the wet poplar branches.

In the garden a thrush was singing joyously.

"Mother!" Clara whispered.

"Yes."

"Look!"

Hann had pulled himself up, looked at the flittering moonlight that danced on the walls, and held out his hand to the two dark figures.

Clara pressed his hand hopefully.

The boy in surprise looked hard at the girl, then he said—

“Are you there, Lina?”

“Hann!” cried his mother, horrified.

“Be quiet!” rebuked Clara, sitting by the sick boy’s side and pushing the damp hair back from his forehead. The movement seemed to soothe him—at least, he held her hand tightly. “So,” he said after a time. “That’s nice.”

Then he became restless again.

“Lina,” he rambled on, “I can’t get it out of my head. I’m always thinking of it—always. About Bruno, Lina,”—his voice became imploring. “It’s all right about him, isn’t it? I can’t sleep any more. Think, I always try to avoid Clara Toll—old Kusemann knows everything. Ah, Lina, if you had only stayed at home!”

“Clara,” cried his mother, horrified and ashamed, “he’s delirious!”

“Yes, he’s wandering,” the girl said quietly, without moving or taking away her hand from his brow.

“And how you used to dance, Lina—do you remember? And the pot of gold pieces from the sunken town. And in prison, I always thought of you. You are never out of my head. But the anxiety—the anxiety——”

The little woman fidgeted in the darkness on her chair, and at last called for light. They must have a light. It must be light.

Clara obeyed her. In a few minutes a candle was

burning on a chair by the bed. The feeble flame flickered in the draught—like the sick boy's soul.

He looked round in the uncertain light.

"Clara," he whispered at last.

"Yes, Hann—do you know me?"

"Yes, yes. Why shouldn't I? But—but wasn't there some one else here?"

"Only mother."

"Mother? I thought some one——" He stammered and sank back, and said again softly, "I thought some one——"

Then all was quiet.

It was nearly midnight. On the bench in front of the schoolhouse, under the flowering lilacs which were sweetening the night air with their scent, sat a girl, hiding her head between her hands as if she wished it were still darker, and thought and thought.

In the distance a gust of wind ruffled the lonely water, and the church clock tolled.

It seemed as if the night grieved that she was forsaken. The girl stood up, groped about, as if she were looking for something she could not find, then shook her head, and thought and thought.

CHAPTER II

LINA'S SECRET

IT was summer-time.

The Consul had gone to the well-known Belgian watering-place with his daughter and her fiancé, leaving his business in the hands of several old and tried agents, as well as in those of the enterprising Bruno. And just at this time there was great excitement in the shipping trade.

On the other side of the ocean, at Cuba, the American guns had gone off one morning, and the sound of their thunder had turned out the little German Philistines from their beds—those little proprietors who had put their savings in Spanish shares.

But one Spanish squadron still lay intact in a sheltered spot somewhere on the coast of the New World—no one knew exactly where. That fleet could scatter the Americans—could take Admiral Dewey by surprise, could—— Speculations were rife—telegrams flew.

Bruno was having a very good time; he had never felt so alert, so full of energy, or so good-humoured.

Yes, the queen of hearts had certainly turned out a trump card. His purse was always full of gold and his pocket-book of bank-notes. Every day he went to Kroll's wine-shop, and drank regularly half a

bottle of champagne, and planned many delightful little surprises for Lina.

Ah! what a charming sweetheart Lina made! How wildly she had clung to him! How unexpected and various were her moods—which only made her more desirable in his eyes! And then—he noticed this distinctly—how quickly the spiteful little kitten was being tamed, how submissive she had become—all her defiance cowed! In the brief moments when they were alone together, he was surprised to see that she scarcely lifted her eyes, and readily acquiesced in his plans.

When he spoke of their future, she raised her delicate face, which was sometimes so pale, and gazed at him so earnestly, so imploringly, that he felt quite perplexed.

What could it mean?

Yes, yes, she wished this long engagement to come to an end. She had set her heart on the bridal veil—well, she would soon be wearing it—and her little feet should be shod in golden shoes. She had always longed for luxuries, and would never be satisfied with a clerk's meagre pay—so—he had painted their future, and he also could not bear privation—he, surely not—that could not be their end.

He had only to make up his mind—directly the moment came, he must seize it. All his little experiments had turned out so well.

In the mornings, when he passed through the old office, and looked at the Consul's empty chair with its worn-out cushions, the shabby desk, and the enormous old safe, he felt overwhelmed with anxiety; then he would stare blindly before him, and his companions

had to repeat their questions many times before they received an answer.

One morning, during this period of suspense, he received some news which caused him much alarm.

A young clerk came up to him and asked—

“Have you heard the news?”

No answer.

“The American ships have been blown up by a mine.”

“What? What did you say?”

“Here—a telegram from London.”

Bruno staggered.

The moment had come which he was to seize.

He stood and looked with trembling hands at the clerks' faces, looked at the old smoky wall-paper, listened to the creaking of the revolving chairs, and turned in surprise to the partition, behind which the cashier, a trembling, bent, little old man with blue spectacles, had sat for years, sorting the piles of bank-notes and entering the amount into the ledger.

Slowly he dropped his uplifted hands, and the telegram fluttered to the ground; a stifled groan came from the heaving breast.

Once more the firm had exerted their power over him. Once more custom had proved the stronger.

He stood and listened anxiously to the scratching of the nibs, the rustling of the leaves, and the creaking of the old safe, which all seemed to be offering him consolation. And from the Consul's chair he thought he heard a mocking voice—

“Now, my dear Klüth! Why so deep in thought?”

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"Lina," said Fräulein Dewitz that same afternoon, "you walk up and down, and don't settle to your work; those stockings, for example, which you ought to have knitted for me, have been lying for days untouched on the work-table. What is the matter with you? You look so white, and never laugh, like you used to do." She straightened her glasses and looked hard at the girl. "Don't you feel well?"

The girl stopped in her walk and forced her mouth to its old smile. "It's nothing," she said indifferently, although she was all the time unconsciously clenching and unclenching her hands convulsively.

The sewing-mistress sat on the step by the window, drinking her coffee and watching the passers-by; she put down her cup, and tried to change the trend of her charge's thoughts.

"Do you know, Lina," she went on, "that this morning, while you were at market, that queer old pilot from Moorluke came again with a message from your mother to say that Hann is much better. I was very glad to hear it, and he told me he was trying to get the life-saving medal for Hann, and then he said he was a great friend of our magistrate, and I couldn't help laughing. But"—the old lady pushed up her glasses upon her forehead—"what is the matter with you, Lina? Why are you not listening?"

Lina stood before her, and turned first white, then red.

"I don't know what is the matter with me," she exclaimed suddenly. "I must go out into the air."

The good old lady grew quite anxious. "Yes, do, Lina; go out and get me something from the

library. Preferably a historical novel. Something that is both interesting and instructive, like that book we read the other day about the persecution of the Christians. I liked that very much. Now, be off, child, or you will not be back again in time for supper."

Shortly after closing-time, Bruno went slowly up the narrow stairs of the house at the back of the office, where he lived with some of Hollander's head clerks.

He held in his hand the morning edition of the Stralsund paper, which contained the report of the great Spanish naval victory.

"If one could only be quite certain!" he thought, as the step under him creaked. "But the danger—the frightful danger!"

And he thought of the pilot's cottage at Moorluke, and the anxiety weighed on him like a heavy load.

If he only knew the way!

Depressed, distracted by his thoughts, as never before, he entered the little room, which now lay in darkness.

He went up to the table, and was looking for the matches, when something rustled.

Bruno stood still.

A figure rose from the chair by the window and came quickly towards him, and laid a hand on his arm, as if to stop him from striking a light.

The hand trembled.

"Bruno!"

"Good heavens, Lina! How dare you come here? If any one should see you!"

"That doesn't matter now. You must listen to me."

"Lina, what is the matter? Shan't I light the lamp?"

"No."

And then she came nearer to him, clung more and more tightly to his arm, and in a hoarse whisper confessed her secret.

Gradually the whispering died away, and all was quiet; two terrified blanched faces stared blankly at each other through the gloom.

But then—she could not have made a mistake. Shaken as he was, he knelt before her and clung to her in the darkness, his weak nature quite beside itself, and with broken sobs he kissed her feet, her hands, and tried to soothe her fears with entreaties and promises, although his own heart was trembling.

Happy pictures of the future, coloured rose by his momentary excitement, came easily to his lips; but she would not allow herself to be misled again.

"Then in a week," she insisted, "you will come to Fräulein Dewitz?"

"Of course—of course—need you ask me?"

"And also to our people at Moorluke?"

He promised that too, and with a deep sigh of relief she let him kiss her on the lips.

"Do you know," she said, as if to herself, "if you had not been kind to me, I think I could have killed you."

"Lina!" he stammered.

"No, no; I did not mean it."

And again their lips met, and the next moment he heard the sound of her retreating steps.

He was alone, and looked at the place where she had stood. At the same time he wondered why this news should have soothed the torment of his thoughts. He felt as if he could never think again—only stand still and listen indifferently to the beating of his own heart.

How it throbbed !

Was it from fear ?

Fear ! Of what ?

And suddenly the tormenting terror came again ; dark, ominous pictures flashed through his brain, always faster and more distinctly ; his heart seemed to stand still in his breast.

What could he do ?

Now he would have to work—work for wife and child. Life would be a mere struggle for existence on the meagre pittance of an inferior clerk. Mornings, afternoons, and evenings, that little chair would creak before his desk ; his liberty would become more and more restricted ; all his pleasures would dwindle away ; all the things he had longed for—— An inferior clerk must save.

No pleasure, no luxuries, no more travels—only economy, economy.

He put out his hand as if to beat off the words that had so often troubled him in his boyhood, but the movement brought his thoughts back again to the present.

Good God in heaven, it must be done—done at once, before the catastrophe fell. There could be no delay—no escape.

And yet—and yet——

There, in the centre of the dark room, pictures flashed as in a cinematograph before his bewildered eyes.

What was that?

A rolling sea, battleships, the thunder of cannons, and then again the rushing and hurrying of crowds of excited people on the Hamburg Stock Exchange. The figures came and went on the black board. There were loud shouts of joy—no, no, he must not think of it.

He must not encourage this idea, that would make life so simple, so easy, that——

No, no, it would be better to sit for ever on that office chair, writing, writing—until his fingers were crippled, and he grew old and bent, always mocked at and scolded by Hollander, and——

“Light!”

Who had lit the little green lamp? He did not know.

Who told him the words that he wrote on the paper?

When the last letter was written, he felt half paralysed with fatigue.

Almost unconsciously he put the paper in his pocket, took up his hat, and went out into the summer evening.

He walked on, weary, and spiritless, not lifting his head until he reached the large post-office which had just been built by the market-place.

At the side entrance hung a red transparency with the words, “Telegraph Office.”

He had reached his goal.

He went up to the counter. The clerk read the form, and asked, "To Hamburg?"

"Yes, to Hamburg," he answered indifferently,—“to Solmsen, the banker.”

Then he paid, and went out again into the summer night.

For a wonder, the square seemed quite deserted, and all the adjoining streets were empty. Bruno felt suddenly that he did not belong there, but had been expelled to some unknown land.

He looked askance at the red Gothic houses lying bathed in the evening light, as if he saw them for the first time.

Where was he to go now?

Home, of course—back into the little room, to sleep and to forget.

When he reached the office, he found a clerk standing in the doorway, who told him respectfully that a gentleman was waiting to see him in his room.

Bruno hesitated a moment, and then walked listlessly and without curiosity up the stairs.

The little green lamp was still burning, and as he opened the door he saw the back of a man dressed in black standing in the middle of the room; the figure turned sharply round.

It was his brother Paul.

"You?" asked the incomer, disappointed and at the same time a little alarmed; for the presence of the elder man, from whom he had so much to conceal, made him feel restless and uneasy.

The student's austere features were transformed in

a way that no one could have imagined possible, and when he went up to the young man, who had sunk down on a chair overcome with exhaustion and weariness, so much joy danced in his eyes that Bruno forgot his depression for a moment, and cried out—

“Paul, what has happened to you?”

“Something very good.”

“But what?”

“They have made me a pastor—pastor on the Walsin, my boy!”

The speaker's voice trembled with excitement, and then he added that his greatest ambition had been realised, and how it had always been old pilot Klüth's dearest wish—ah! if only he had lived to see this day!—“and you too, Bruno, for you are also on the road to fame.”

The new pastor stopped speaking, for he did not care to give way to such tender reminiscences, but he still held his companion's hand, and did not notice that Bruno's head was sinking lower and lower, until it nearly touched the pastor's fingers; but before Paul could utter an exclamation of astonishment, Bruno sprang up impulsively and threw his arms round the elder man with a rough embrace. And although Paul could not help laughing at the boy's emotional temperament, he was secretly touched at the sign of so much affection.

Then Bruno asked eagerly—

“Have you told the others at home?”

“Yes, and I've just come from Lina.”

Bruno cast down his eyes.

"It's curious," Paul went on, as he thoughtfully turned up the lamp, "when I told her the news, she did something I should never have expected of her; she cried, and would not be pacified. I don't believe town life agrees with her."

Bruno moved his chair.

"And mother?" he asked uneasily.

"I am going to her now, by the harbour train. You'd better come with me, Bruno; think how pleased she would be to see you!"

But the young man declined this proposal. He had a great many letters to write—time was pressing, and he felt very tired. And so, a little while later, Paul went down the stairs alone.

As he crossed the courtyard, Bruno stood at the window, watching the dark figure, which in its black garb seemed hardly distinguishable from the night. His footsteps echoed loudly and firmly on the pavement, and for a moment Bruno felt an unconquerable desire to run after the dark figure and hold it back at any price. As he watched, the moon rose slowly and turned all the roofs and spires to silver, and a mellow light shone over the courtyard. "Of course," Bruno said to himself, "light must come again." And for the moment he felt comforted.

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There was one Sunday that the Klüths never forgot as long as they lived.

When everything was destroyed and no brick remained standing on another, when the coffins were mouldering in the churchyard, and only the howling wind bore news to the frightened, longing hearts, did

those who were left behind think of this day, and piece together their recollections of it.

The summer sun shone peacefully into the old lady's room that morning, as if it meant to polish every chair over again.

"Bright—bright—bright," hummed the sunbeams. And Fräulein Dewitz herself looked neater and happier than she had ever done before, or ever would do again. She was reading the newspaper aloud. Lina stood before the looking-glass and fastened on a red bow. She felt happier than she had been for some days, and was astonished to find that she was prettier than ever. She turned and twisted before the glass.

"Listen, Lina," read the sewing-mistress, shaking her head. "Here it is, in large print. 'Total Destruction of the Spanish Fleet by the Americans.' Admiral Cervera jumped into the water, but he was saved by his son. He must have been a very brave young man. But, as I have said before, I cannot endure the Americans—such Republicans seem to me very wild people." Here she was interrupted by the ringing of the bell, and Bruno walked into the room.

Both the ladies were delighted to see how smart and well-set-up the young man looked in his grey summer suit. He kissed the old lady's hand, paid her many compliments on her appearance, told her that the Consul was expected to return that morning, and concluded with the request that Lina might be allowed to go with him to Moorluke, as he wanted to go and see his people.

Unfortunately he could not obtain permission, for

although Fräulein Dewitz highly approved of the strong affection the young people felt for their family, she intended to go and meet the Consul and his daughter at the station, and Lina must go with her, for Dina's sake ; any other day she would be delighted to let her go with him.

Bruno seemed disconcerted at the refusal ; he chatted on for a few minutes, and then got up to go. Lina went out of the room with him. Outside the glass door, she held him fast for a moment.

Later on, it seemed inexplicable to her how easily and simply everything had turned out. But the great moments in life pass by as quickly as the little ones, even as this had done.

She laid her hand lightly on his shoulder and nestled against him.

"Bruno," she asked, fixing her dark eyes imploringly on his face, "you will keep to our agreement?"

"To our agreement? Yes, yes," he said quickly, and seemed to be in a great hurry.

"The day after to-morrow you'll come to Fräulein Dewitz, won't you?" she persisted.

He nodded, traced some figures on the floor with his stick, then seized her hand suddenly.

"Lina, you must come with me now."

"But you know I can't. Besides, I am not properly dressed."

"Come just as you are."

"Why? Has anything happened?" She looked at him intently.

He started. "No, no. What do you mean? Certainly not."

She smiled again, and he was just on the first step when she tapped her fingers lightly on his shoulder.

He sprang back suddenly, pressed her to his heart, and a hurried stolen kiss burned on her lips.

But the noise of the fine sand grinding under their feet frightened Lina, and she turned to go back.

"Take care!" she whispered warningly.

He stroked her cheek again, and then ran with little bounds down the stairs. Lina crept back to Fräulein Dewitz, and as she passed the mirror she was again seized with the proud conviction that beauty was an irresistible influence in the world. Then she flitted here and there, and hummed to herself, as she used when she was a child.

Later on, in Moorluke, they remembered about it, and wondered why they had not thought of it before.

It was all so simple.

On the Sunday afternoon, at the hour when the fishermen were standing in groups on the quay-side, gossiping with each other, and the girls were walking up and down arm in arm, Bruno, who had been to see his mother, stood leaning over the harbour rails with Hann the philosopher, and gazed lazily at the water and plied him with sympathetic questions.

Where had he got that red scar on his forehead? And was it true, as old Kusemann had called out just now as he passed by, that Hann was going to be married? And who was the bride? And had he saved a nice little sum to set up a house of his own?

But Hann had answered all these questions with a shake of his head, and then it came out that he had

always worked only for Siebenbrod, but that his step-father was now going to pay him by the week. - It was better to be on the safe side.

"Yes, with Siebenbrod," shouted old Kusemann, as he passed back again. "They call him 'Rothschild' at the savings bank."

Later on, Siebenbrod remembered that Bruno, before he returned to the town, had had a talk with him.

Siebenbrod, his hands folded, sat on the bench that stood facing the river, in front of his cottage, and basked in the sun. The following conversation took place between them:—

"How spick and span everything looks here, Siebenbrod!" Bruno told him. "What a hard-working man you are!"

The fisherman rubbed his hands. "Ay, I've learnt that well enough."

"It seems to me that you have increased our property since my father's death."

"Yes," said the boatman, and looked at his woollen stockings which were peeping out of his wooden shoes; "and yet the people here are very evil-minded, for they are always saying something against me."

"But the two cows have now become five."

"Yes, and yet I always say that they eat me out of house and home. If your mother did not want so much fresh milk, I should have got rid of them long ago. But when any one is ill—what is the proverb?—'When you have a sick wife in the house, everything goes to the dogs!'—but one never knows."

With that he got up and shuffled into the house.

Bruno stared after him.

That was the last.

And again he stood and wondered why he felt as if nothing seemed to matter—as if everything was horribly hollow, dim, and far away—as if his spirit had left his body.

Then he said good-bye quickly, and caught the next train back to the town.

"Be quiet, Sultan!" said old Johann to the Consul's poodle that evening, as they sat in the courtyard in front of the office. "Be quiet."

But the poodle growled again, and a light shone from one of the windows of the counting-house, and old Johann climbed on a chest and peeped through the iron bars into the room.

He climbed down again, and returned to his seat. "Be quiet," he said. "It's only Herr Klüth—that's all right."

CHAPTER III

A DISCOVERY AND A FLIGHT

LINA was the first to hear it. Fräulein Dewitz returned from paying a morning call at the Consul's house, locked and double-locked the door behind her as if she were being followed by a policeman, and sank down, white with fright, in her hat and cloak, on the sofa.

"Who would have thought it?" she murmured feebly. "Who would have thought it?"

And she made such a picture of despair that Lina, who was in one of her contradictory moods that morning, could not suppress a laugh, although her heart stood still.

"Don't laugh!" whispered the sewing-mistress, wringing her hands and bursting into tears. "It is too dreadful! I could have sworn by him."

The girl did not laugh now. "By whom?—tell me—by whom, aunty?"

And her voice sounded so shrill and piercing that the old lady looked up, startled. But no—she must have made a mistake, for the girl stood quite quietly in front of her; only her hands were twitching convulsively.

"Whom do you mean, aunty? You said that——?"

And then the old lady despairingly unbuttoned

her gloves, and breathlessly gasped out what she had heard, in broken, disconnected sentences. The Consul had received a letter, before he had even shaved,—just think! he hadn't even shaved,—but Bruno's room was empty and his trunk was gone. And just when she had arrived, Siebenbrod and Paul had been sent for. The new pastor—where was his living? At Walsin or Swensin? Ah, well, it didn't matter now. And old Johann had been the first to notice it, for he had seen a light in the cashier's office the night before. Really, who could have believed that this superior, well-educated young man could have been a thief—a thief! God have mercy upon her—she could hardly say the word! “And can you believe it, Lina, he forged the Consul's name for twelve hundred and fifty pounds at the Exchange, and what for? They all said on account of the Americans. Yes, yes, Lina, you can believe me, when I say that it is not right for a Republic to become so powerful.”

So the old lady gasped and stammered, and buttoned and unbuttoned her gloves, and never noticed the big tears running down her cheeks; for in her heart she mourned the loss of her favourite, who had always kissed her hand so politely.

What had she always called him? A “*cavalier d'ancien régime*.” Ah, dear God! and now he was a thief! But who could understand this young world? Then she pulled herself together, unlocked the door, and following an unconquerable impulse, prepared to hurry back to Hollander's house to talk it over once more, when it suddenly struck her that Lina had never said a word.

She cast a surprised glance at her charge. Lina was sitting on the sewing-mistress's seat by the window and fidgeting with the fringe of the cushion with a nervous smile. Fräulein Dewitz started. How strangely the girl's lips were quivering in her white face! How stiff her fingers looked! And with unnatural calm she seemed to be holding her breast, as if she was trying not to scream.

"Dear God!"

Fräulein Dewitz was so startled at the sight that she forgot everything else, and her hand trembled on the door-handle.

"Lina!" she stammered.

But the girl still played with the fringe, and her features worked convulsively. At last she seemed able to speak. "Does any one know," she asked breathlessly, "where he has gone?"

"Where?"

The old lady thought for a moment. Had she forgotten that, in her hurry? To America, of course. He had escaped over the water, where all the wretches go when they have lost their honour, and——

The old lady's thoughts were running off again, when Lina stood up, and she was brought sharply back to the present.

"My God!" she said to herself, "the girl can hardly stand; it must have been a great shock to her."

"Lina!" she stammered anxiously, "what is the matter?"

But the girl had forgotten all her lessons in self-control, and a loud hysterical scream ran through the room. She rushed up to Fräulein Dewitz and shook

her arm, as if the poor woman had committed a crime against her.

"Has he left nothing for me?" she cried, and clenched her fists. "I must know if he has left anything for me!"

"For you?" faltered Fräulein Dewitz, almost senseless with fright.

"Has he left nothing for me?" the girl cried again in despair.

And when the sewing-mistress asked her timidly what it was she expected Bruno to leave for her, the girl gave a wild laugh that mocked at all convention, and went down on her knees before the chest of drawers and began to turn it out.

Everything crashed and rolled to the ground, and the old lady could hardly believe her eyes.

"There—and there—and there!"

"Good God! What does it mean?"

The poor old woman's hands began to tremble with fright, everything seemed to swim before her eyes, and she had to hold fast to the door-handle to keep herself from falling.

"Lina! merciful Heaven—where did you get all that from?"

"That? That?"

The mad girl did not know for the moment. How should she know? She could not remember. She gathered her chains and rings together and beat them with her fist—then she drew out a photograph of Bruno and tore it to pieces, the next moment she pressed the fragments to her lips, and then dashed them away from her in horror.

And the poor old woman!

An explanation slowly dawned in her bewildered brain—the only one that seemed possible to her simple soul.

“Lina!” she stammered, half paralysed with fear and surprise, “do you mean that you loved him?”

“Yes—no—oh, I don’t know!”

“Lina, won’t you tell me all about it?”

“No!” The girl raised herself on to her knees, looked wildly round, and gathered the ornaments together. “I’m going away!”

“Going away? Away from me? Why?”

“Because I’ve nothing more to do here. Because I won’t be turned out. Because I never want to hear or see anything here again!” she cried in passionate anger. And without giving her hand, or uttering a word of thanks to the old woman who had taken her as a child, Lina threw a last scornful glance at the simple room, and ran away, with bare head and fluttering skirts, just as she had come.

The sewing-mistress sat on the sofa, buttoned and unbuttoned her gloves, tried to get up to run after her foster-daughter, then sank back again, and sought to understand it all, and thought, and thought, and wrung her hands.

Was it possible that a good upbringing had no effect upon character? And was there no gratitude left in the world? No word of thanks? And all good teaching was in vain? Who would take care of the little house? Who would look after the housekeeping? Was there no more gratitude

in the world? How was it possible? Young world—old world—how was it possible?

Meanwhile Lina ran through the streets, with her little bundle in her hand. Her head was bare, for in her trouble she had forgotten to be a lady; she was once more the pilot's daughter, the fisher-girl, who thought that she was bitterly wronged and that the whole world had sinned against her, and between rage and shame the thought filtered vaguely through her brain that she must be revenged.

On whom?

She did not know, but burning with scorn and anger, goaded by rage which lent her a feeling of untamed strength, she ran on, and while she hurried to the river that ran by Moorluke, a thousand wild voices whispered within her: she would be able to escape, whatever happened; she would be triumphant; she would——

Stormily she hurried on, against the roaring wind which blew in from the sea. She did not notice how grey and overcast the sky had become, nor hear the rustling of the rushes by the bank, and the crackling of the storms of dust as they rushed by her. She ran on, not knowing whither—to mother, or to Hann, or to any one else. Aimlessly she rushed on, until suddenly dark trees rose before her, and in the dim uncertain light she saw the ruins of the monastery in the distance.

When the red masonry appeared suddenly in front of her, she stood still.

She crouched down as if she had been struck. A

tremor of pain ran through her; for the first time she thought of the man with whom she had once sat among those ruins, and how, when she was a little girl, he had rocked her to sleep on his knees; that had been the beginning of it all.

Yes, yes, it had been over there.

She lifted her arm and shook her fist at the ruins, and the wind ruffled her hair. Miserable coward! first to bring her to shame—to shame, and then to run away and leave her in the lurch amongst mocking faces.

Yes, yes, that was it; her arm sank to her side, she looked round in bewilderment, and for the first time noticed that the wind blew through her jacket and that the rustling reeds were bending down to the dark, mysterious water below. How it gurgled! and how forsaken she was! A few cows grazing by the river-side were the only signs of life.

She shivered and pulled out a handful of the reeds. If only some one would come! But nothing stirred. She was surrounded by grief and loneliness.

Yes, she would be shunned by all; for the people here were afraid of shame—they crept away from it. Lina remembered how often Fräulein Dewitz had blessed herself and made the sign of the cross, and how in the future she would have to turn elsewhere for comfort and shelter. She had never before looked the matter in the face. She bit the rushes, then threw them down and stamped on them in her despair, weeping aloud, and shook her fists again at the ruins: "Miserable coward!"

But what was that?

Through the roaring wind a long howling cry came

from over the water, penetrating and weird. Lina was too unnerved to recognise that the cry probably came from one of the cows, and stood and gazed with wide-open eyes over the water and the dim level.

What had she called him? A "miserable coward"?—No, no; that wasn't true. She alone was to blame. She had used a witch's art to allure him.

Her senses were all in confusion. As if in sport, she stepped quickly over the boggy bank that sank under her feet, until the black water oozed over her shoes.

Oh, it was icy cold!

She turned abruptly, and hurried again on her way.

Over there, a few steps distant, rose the Moorluke Tower, and just at her side was the broken bridge, and there by the broken posts some fishermen were busy with the ferry, and amongst them she thought she recognised Hann's stout figure.

And now?—Was not some one calling "Lina"?

No, no, she could not meet Hann—that would be the worst of all. The mere thought of his honest face filled her with dread. And some one cried again—

"Lina!"

She did not wait to hear any more, but turned and ran back, with flying skirts, along the road, muttering to herself, "Not Hann—not Hann!"

Before her lay the town, veiled in a blue mist.

In half an hour she would be back again, back in the place whence she had fled. How long had she been? And where could she go? To whom was she running so fast? She began to sob wildly in her

perplexity. Should she go back to Fräulein Dewitz and confess everything? No, no; even the black water would be preferable to that. Then suddenly she thought of Paul—the new pastor. Why should she think of him? She was too agitated to reason; she only felt that he was the right person to help her. Peace lay in his calling.

It was the dinner-hour when she entered his room, and found it empty. But the landlady told her that she thought Paul would be back shortly, as he had only been called away by one of the Consul's servants, and Lina determined to wait.

Dead tired, she sank down on a chair, and the bundle which she had unconsciously carried so far fell on the ground by her side.

She started at the sound, but did not move. Motionless, with closed eyes, she lay huddled up on the seat, and her thoughts circled dreamily—"How peaceful—how peaceful!"

Hour after hour passed by. She had no desire to move, only each time she raised her head her eyes fell on a little white statue of Christ, which stood on the wooden chest of drawers; the arms were stretched out invitingly, and the eyes seemed to be looking at her.

She closed her eyes again, but the white figure ever rose before her, and suddenly she thought that was how He must have looked when He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me."

What wonderful words: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me."

And at that moment she remembered how horrible

it had felt when the black bog gave way under her feet. And again it seemed as if she were sinking down deeper and deeper into the slimy black mud. All earthly sounds faded away, and gradually the peace of the room took full possession of the exhausted girl.

A black figure came to her in her dream, who looked at her with such piercing eyes that she was afraid, and when she felt his bony hand on her arm she cried aloud.

She started up. The little room was almost dark. Paul stood before her.

"Is it you?" she stammered, as she tried to collect her thoughts, and trod so heavily on the bundle that it creaked. "Are you back at last?"

He looked at her in amazement for a moment, then he seemed able to account for her presence; for he asked quickly if Fräulein Dewitz had heard of what had happened. Lina nodded her head silently, and he sat down by the table and covered his eyes with his hand. After a moment he sprang up again, and strode with heavy steps up and down the dark room, followed by the girl's bewildered eyes as she sat with her thoughts in a whirl.

The new pastor stopped, and stood before her. Why did she break down like this, and look as if she were going to crouch in a heap on his chair for ever?

"Lina, tell me, why have you come here?" he asked, and his voice sounded so harsh and strained that the girl noticed how he had to control himself to be able to speak at all.

But her thoughts no longer flowed quickly.

"To you," she muttered wearily. "Yes, I've come to you."

She bowed her head, and sank back in a heap on the chair.

Paul frowned, and looked searchingly at the girl through the dusk, but Lina did not move.

The theologian became uneasy.

What did this hopeless despair mean? He had never seen Lina's high spirits depressed like this before. Was this breakdown only the result of the family disgrace? He looked at the girl critically, and began to feel the same distrust against her as he felt against the whole world, since Bruno's deceit.

"Why didn't you go straight to our people at Moorluke at a time like this?" he demanded.

"To my people?" she asked wonderingly. And then sank back again, as if the darkness and the silence made her wish only for peace. "Let me be," she murmured drowsily,—*"let me be."*

"Let you be?" he asked angrily. "Don't you know what has happened?" and his words alone would have failed to rouse her, for she stretched herself a little, and her head sank lower; she was just falling to sleep again when her feet pressed so hard against the bundle that it gave an ominous rattle. She hastily pulled herself together—the clink of the gold had roused her at last.

"What have you got there?" asked Paul, who had heard the sound.

"That? Oh, it's nothing."

"Take my advice, and go back to mother. You

will not often have the chance of seeing our house again."

"I?"

Terror overcame her. She got up slowly. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Because it's going to be sold, with our boats, and the cows, and my books, and everything else. Our home will be broken up."

He stood still in the middle of the rapidly darkening room and buried his head in his hands. A low groan sounded through the room, but Lina took no heed of it.

"Will they follow him?" she asked hoarsely, and saw how the question excited her companion.

"I don't know," he answered reluctantly; and then he began to stride up and down again, and to pour into Lina's indifferent ears a long story of how he and Siebenbrod had gone to see the Consul, and how he had argued with them both, and how at last mother at Moorluke had decided what they should do. During a pause Paul lit the small lamp, and a dismal light shone in the little room. Lina was again seized with anxious foreboding. Where could she go for peace? Where could she find a corner for the night? Where a shelter from shame?

"Do you know where he has gone?" she asked, and drummed with her fingers on the table.

But Paul could not control himself any longer. "The thief!" he shouted, turning purple with fury. "The blackguard, who turned his mother out of her house while he decked his women with gold chains and bracelets! Oh, if I only knew where to find

him! If I could only get hold of him just once!"

He caught hold of a chair and banged it with such force against the ground that the legs cracked. Lina stared at him.

She had turned very white. Slowly she bent down and picked up her bundle, for she knew she could not stay there any longer. As she got up, her gaze fell once more on the little white statue.

"Suffer the little children to come unto Me," she murmured absent-mindedly. But she was so exhausted she could not move, only stand still, with her hands hanging at her side.

Then she felt her arm gripped so fiercely that she screamed with the pain, and dark, distrustful eyes peered into her face.

"Why do you say that?" he cried hoarsely. "You were thrown so much together. I tell you openly, I distrust you—do you hear?—I distrust you. And what have you got in that parcel? I insist on knowing."

He stretched out his hand, but she held her treasure high in the air.

Then she began to laugh, wildly, mockingly, despairingly, and when she turned aside she saw the dark night looking in through the window.

The pastor came up to her again, more menacingly than before.

Yes, she saw that all was lost. Everything had fallen at once. There was no peace for her here.

And the night peeped in, and called and called.

With a wild movement, she held out her bundle towards him.

"You want to know what's in the bundle?" she screamed, and turned it inside out, and the contents rolled on to the floor. "Here, look at them! Chains, bracelets, and rings! They are worth a good deal, and they are all mine—mine—to sell—do you hear?"

Then she gathered a handful together and hurled them with all her might at Paul's feet, dashed the whole bundle on the ground, gave a wild laugh at his hopeless bewilderment, and ran through the door, like a dog who fears a blow. Paul heard her steps going down the stairs—heard a shrill cry, and the sound of the house-door banging. He never moved, only stood and stared with cold horror at the jewels, which lay in a ring round his feet like a golden snake; a great glittering ring—the everlasting tempter of mankind.

CHAPTER IV

THE KLÜTH FAMILY PAY THEIR DEBTS

MEANWHILE, Dietrich Siebenbrod was sitting under the shade of the oil lamp that hung from the ceiling in the public-house at Moorluke. It was the first time he had been there since his marriage, and he had broken his pledge, for a large glass of brandy stood on the table by his side.

But there was no need for him to keep his promise now; everything was over. And he muttered to himself over and over again, "Everything has gone—the trade, and the stock, and the cottage, and the savings in the bank—yes, and the five cows." But why? why?

With a growl of resentment, the fisherman pushed his long legs farther under the table, and when he had gulped down the brandy he wiped his red face, for it was some time since he had taken anything so strong.

"Ah! it doesn't taste like it used!" he grumbled, and bit his thumbs, shook himself, rumbled his hair, and wriggled restlessly on his seat, as if he could not get into a comfortable position. Then he turned and looked through the door, left open on account of the heat, across the garden, where the leaves were

falling, to his own cottage, which would soon belong to the barber.

How he had worked to keep up the house when the late Herr Klüth was alive, for he had always felt sure that he would take the old pilot's place.

And now everything was gone. That was all he had got out of marrying into a family above him.

And this pastor, who hadn't an ounce of common sense in his whole body, who didn't know a jib when he saw one—much less a ballast-bag—and couldn't tell a roach from a herring, although he had advised them to put the money in the savings bank—this pastor had the impudence to come along and take possession of the house, and the savings-bank book, and the cows. Ah! that was more than he could stand. No, he never wanted to see or hear of them again—they could all go to the devil, for all he cared. And yet, when one thought of it—— “Möller, give me another drink—your brandy is very good. You might as well bring me the whole bottle while you are about it. I shall stop here some time, out of spite—out of pure spite. Here's your health!”

It had happened early that morning. He had come in after a long night's fishing, and sat down to rest on the settle by the hearth. He was just dozing off a little, and mother, who was sitting by his side, had taken the coffee-cup out of his hand, so that it should not fall on the red tiles, when the harbour-master walked abruptly into the kitchen with the announcement that Hollander the Consul

had telephoned to say that Siebenbrod must go at once to the office——

“Möller, Möller, bring me another drink!”——

And then mother's surprised voice: “Siebenbrod you will see, something has gone wrong.”

“Yes, mother, I have been expecting it for some time.”

“You too? Do you think that something has happened to Bruno?”

“See here, mother, when a man wears coloured linen shirts and light trousers, then——”

“Good heavens, Siebenbrod, what do you mean?”

“I mean, that if a man does that, he ought to be born to it. And then——”

“Yes—go on.”

“Then yesterday he asked me so many questions about our savings, and our cows, and I always feel suspicious when people are inquisitive about one's private affairs.”

“Oh, go quickly!” cried the old woman from her chair, wringing her hands. “Go at once!”

“Oh yes, mother, I'm going right enough—but I tell you, it won't be any good.”

He met the new pastor at the office, and they were both shown to the Consul's private room. Before they had had time to exchange a few words of surprise at their meeting, the Consul entered the room, threw himself down on the leather couch, and as if he were reciting the most trivial anecdote, told his visitors of Bruno's theft and disappearance. Although the news did not affect him in the least, the fisherman had thought it right to assume a

perturbed expression, and he was highly amused to see that although Hollander rubbed his knee irritably as he told his tale, he smiled self-appraisingly at the same time, as one who had been in the right all along.

"Yes, indeed," he said, "it was very careless of me. I ought to have taken more precaution. I shall lose heavily, of course—but didn't I always say he was an untrustworthy fellow? Now, my dear pastor, I should like to speak to you privately for a few moments. Will you come this way?"

And they went into the empty cashier's room, leaving the fisherman calmly sitting there, as if he had nothing further to do with the matter.

He grew furious at this part of his memories, and pushed his feet against the legs of the table until they creaked, and shouted hoarsely—

"A pint of half-and-half, Möller—and shut that confounded door, so that I can't see my house any more. Ah! that's better—good gin—good beer——"

The pastor had been a long time with Hollander in the office, and when they came out at last, Paul's eyelids were red. Paul had walked with the fisherman to the harbour, and they both took the little steamer up the river to Moorluke.

But Paul's company, and the brooding silence of the quiet, taciturn man, down whose cheek a tear trickled from time to time, began to weigh on Siebenbrod.

"Why are you coming? To see my wife?" he asked, as they stood by the funnel of the steamer and gazed into the surging water.

"Yes."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to retrieve our honour."

"What?" The fisherman stuck both hands into his pockets and roared with laughter. "I should like to tell you something, Herr Pastor. I have stolen nothing, and so I owe no one anything—do you understand?"

Paul looked at him blankly, as if he had not heard the words, then turned again to the gunwale, and stared silently into black seething water for the rest of the passage.

He took no further notice of the fisherman, spoke no word to him, and if his eye chanced to fall on him seemed not to recognise him.

Ah yes! he was only a common fisherman with wooden shoes on his feet.

"Möller, Möller, bring me another drink. Now I can't see my cottage any longer—Hurrah! Now, at least, I shan't see the house, and the pastor, and the old woman—let them all go to the devil."

When they got home the old woman lay fainting in her chair; Hann was bathing her hands with cold water, and she kept calling the thief's name. And then, she had asked to be left alone with her eldest son, and Siebenbrod, as at the Consul's, sat on the bench by the river, and put his hands in his pockets, and stared at his wooden shoes and wondered dejectedly: "What is going to happen?" And then it came:

"Rascals! Educated men, mad women, he could do very well without them.—Möller, bring us another drink. Listen to this. They mean to pay back to

that stingy old fox of a Hollander every penny he has lost—do you hear? Twelve hundred and fifty pounds! Ah! that's a good joke! They'll never have another peaceful moment. And they are really in earnest. But they can all go to the devil. What does it matter to me? If they have saved so much, they can do it. I don't care. Mother perhaps has got it all hidden in her stocking. But they want my book from the savings bank—and my house!"

Breathless and crimson with fury, he smashed one glass after the other, and the splinters fell in a shower at his feet.

"What? My house—my little home—my books! Are you mad? I have nothing, and I shall give nothing—do you hear? Eight years' hard work thrown away—and now—— Get out of my way!"

Again he shouted for beer. But what happened then?

He stared straight in front of him. Yes, he could see it all now, quite distinctly. From the chair in which she had sat for years, the crippled woman got up slowly and stiffly. And gently, quite gently, she stretched out her white hand towards him.

"Siebenbrod, I have let you have the house and the money for all these years. But now I want them back again."

"Mother! You want to take my money away from me?"

"Siebenbrod, I must."

"But, mother, think, to whom does it belong?"

"It belongs to me. I brought it all to you. The house and the savings-book are written in my name."

"That is all very well, but I only put it in the savings-book for precaution's sake. I beseech you, have mercy, don't take away my savings! It is all that I have."

The tears streamed from her eyes, and she looked as if she would die.

"Siebenbrod, I must."

"Then—everything can go to the devil!" he howled. "Now I know with whom I have had to deal for so long! Here—here——"

He lurched towards the chest of drawers, and a few books fell with their pages crumpled face-downwards on the floor.

"Here, pastor—here you are—take it, the whole lot, and the house as well—the barber always wanted it. And the cows—good God, yes, the cows too. What has it got to do with me? I have nothing more to say. You can all go to the devil together. I don't care——"

And now he sat in the deserted public-house, and the leaves rustled in the breeze. Twilight deepened, and night came on.

"Your health, Möller, your health! How dark it is getting! Your beer is really very good. But who's that coming in? Isn't it old Kusemann? Good! Sit here, old Kusemann. I used not to like you, but that doesn't matter now. H'm, what do you say?"

"I'm not curious, Siebenbrod, but is it true what Hann has told me—that your house——"

"Yes, it is to be sold."

"And the stock and the boats as well?"

"Everything."

"Good Lord! I'm surprised to hear it. But what are you going to do afterwards?"

"I?—I? Old Kusemann, why have you four eyes and two noses? I shall wring your neck if you look like that again. Or I shall hang you up on the door-post. But you're a clever man, tell me, what does a fellow feel like when he hangs himself?"

"What? That would be a foolish thing to do. He hears music, like in a ball-room. But you won't do that."

"Don't worry yourself. Oh, the world's a stupid place. When I was a boy, I always wanted a musical-box, and now—but let us drink—— I like the idea of the music—are you sure you're telling the truth? But let us drink—again and again. Phew! Life smells like a rotten herring!"

Fresh disturbance came to the pilot's cottage towards evening, when Paul appeared for the second time, in order, as he said, to inquire after his mother, but really to take Hann aside and tell him all his suspicions of Lina. The young clergyman was quite broken down. While the two brothers stood whispering in the dark passage, so that their mother, who was crying quietly to herself in the parlour, should not hear, Paul had to support himself against the front door.

"That they should sink so low!" he murmured, and almost shook the door-handle,—“that they could be so wicked!"

Hann stood beside him, in his blue drill trousers and his open sailor's blouse, his head, on which the

straw-coloured hair seemed to be scantier, sunk on his breast. He cleared his throat several times before he answered. And then the words came with difficulty.

"Yes," he replied slowly, "she must have been very fond of him."

The pastor breathed forth audibly. "But she led him on—she behaved like a——"

Here he groaned.

"Yes," said Hann to himself, "I think one way of love is hot, and another cold. One will walk in silk attire, and another in wooden clogs. It all comes as it may."

"But we must control ourselves."

"Yes,"—and Hann shook his head sadly,—"that is what you say. But I've often thought that for some natures it's a pity. Lina, for example, it always seemed to me so with her."

The pastor looked doubtfully at the sailor, then stood up straight, and opened the door. When he saw how dark it was, he complained—

"Night. How are we to find her?"

"We must look for her," Hann replied in low tones, his voice trembling. Stooping, he took a big stable-lantern from the floor and lighted it. A strange dim light filled the long red-tiled passage.

"Suppose she's done anything to herself!" continued the pastor; and again the door rattled, as if he had shaken it.

Hann started. The lantern moved to and fro in his hand. Then he thought.

"No," he decided at last, and pushed the hair off

his forehead; "Lina likes life—it'll all come right."

Paul again looked at him in surprise, and then went up to him and shook his hand convulsively. All intellectual superiority was laid aside.

"How will things be here?" he asked, drawing closer to his brother's side. "See, I take up my post at the Walsin on July first, and the half of my salary, of course, is yours. But a pastor's living in such places is never worth very much, and with the best of wills I can't do anything more. And you, Hann, poor fellow, how will you keep things going here? And with all Siebenbrod's reproaches when the house and cattle are sold! He is much to be pitied, poor man. But—what will you do?"

"Oh," said Hann, casting about for some way of comforting his brother, and looking straight into the lantern,—“see, Paul, we shall keep one of the three boats, and even if Siebenbrod won't help I shall be able to catch something. Oh, we'll get along all right. And then I know of a little room and a kitchen, with a window looking on to the sea, where mother can sit. We'll rent it. It's at Claus Muchow's, the deaf-mute—you know him. And so we'll get along, and things won't be so bad after all.”

There was so much goodness of heart in the simple words that Paul could no longer suppress his feelings, and with a convulsive movement began to stroke the lad's cheek.

"But, my dear Hann," he stammered, "have you thought that in so resolving you are sacrificing your whole life to the family? Have you thought of that?"

"Yes, but there's nothing else to do."

"My dear lad,"—and he put his hand heavily on his shoulder,—“but your betrothed? Have you thought of her? What are you going to say to Clara?”

Hann's head sank lower and lower, and the lantern swung to and fro, as if blown about by the wind.

"Yes," he said at last, with difficulty,—“poor girl, I could have wished her something better. But”—and here he sighed—“she won't lose much in me.”

While they were thus talking, a gust of wind blew through the door, went howling through the house, made the boards shake, and extinguished Hann's lantern.

“Lina!” he called involuntarily, for he imagined the unhappy girl might be somewhere near, and while he relit the lantern with unsteady hands he hastily threw out the question, “And Lina?—what's to become of her?”

The pastor murmured something. Then he turned up his coat-collar, and while they were walking along the road, Hann, who kept close at his side, heard Paul mutter excitedly, “If only I hadn't let her go! If only I'd kept her, as it was my duty to do! But as soon as we've found her, and I can honourably do so, I'll take charge of her. She shall come to me—to me——”

The wind carried off the rest, and they went on to look for her.

Unceasingly the wind howled through the starless night. It raged among the rushes, drove the gurgling water violently against them; now and again the

water subsided, leaving a patch of dry land, then it bubbled up again, and any one trying to walk there might sink ankle-deep in the moist earth.

Some one was actually standing there—a young woman, with her hair blowing about her head, and her skirts caught by the storm fluttering round her limbs. She held fast to the tall shrubs, and peeped at the lights which glimmered from the cottages at Moorluke. But soon she turned back to the cross roads, where the sails of the old windmill were whirling round and round.

A half-wild, half-unconscious smile passed over the girl's face, and she turned from one side to the other, as if unable to come to a decision. There behind the scrubby garden shone the lights in the pilot's cottage. Mother sat there and knitted at her eternal stocking. She was certainly alone. For Siebenbrod, in spite of the storm, would have gone fishing, and she had just seen Hann walking along the road with a lantern. Oh, how ghost-like it had been to see the red beams of the lantern crawling slowly between the rushes, and mirrored in the trembling water! But when the girl looked at the figure that carried it, notwithstanding her forlorn condition, she could not resist giving a short, elfish laugh. Softly, of course, so that he should not hear it, for she did not mean to let herself be discovered.

Ha—ha! how awkwardly the peasant fellow clattered along, holding the lantern stiffly at arm's length in front of him, so as not to miss the way, and—now he stumbled. She gave a wicked laugh.

Must she really go back to the smoky little house

yonder, confess everything, and let herself be gazed at by Hann's reproachful, stupid eyes? And the rest of the villagers? Old Kusemann, who would proclaim her shame from door to door? And Siebenbrod's coarse jokes? "No!" The young woman struck her hand against the rushes, and drew her skirts closer round her. She had made up her mind. She would not condescend to those stupid, narrow creatures, nor to Fräulein Dewitz either. They were all little, provincial people. And then—and then—— She parted the rushes and looked down at the surging water—she would ask for nothing, confess nothing. What had other people to do with her affairs? Especially now, when she intended to make an end of everything. It seemed to her that she had nothing to repent of, and she did not mean to repent. No, no; her mind was more and more obstinately possessed with the remembrance of the glad, wild hour in the little room when she had yielded to temptation, and somehow she could not be angry with Bruno, whom the others called a criminal. It had all been her wish—and now the others, the stupid creatures, should leave her in peace—now she wanted peace, peace and quiet. She took a quick step forwards, the boggy ground yielded, she felt icy cold. Another step; she stumbled on, and the clammy mud was already over her knees.

But why did Lina cling in agony to the tottering reeds? Why did she grasp them behind her as soon as she had torn out a handful? Why did she work her way back, and run like a hunted thing to the windmill?

There she stopped still, her heart beating madly. She had fled there already that morning, but why again now? A cry of despair broke from her, and she pressed her hands hard against her throbbing temples. Then she sought to persuade herself in her confusion of mind that the place was unsuited to her plan. Yes, higher up, where the bank was steeper, where the wall was——

And so she was impelled to run to the spot designated, but against her will her feet were rooted to the ground. Screaming like a weak, timid creature, half unconsciously she clambered on to the lower supports of the mill, as if to prevent herself from going one step farther in the direction of the water.

No, she would not—she would not! She was still so young. There must be a way. She was strong in body and will—she loved life——

“I won’t—I won’t!” she stammered in weak protest.

A great shining spark trembled and tottered backwards and forwards over the road. Sometimes it seemed to go out, then it appeared again, slowly came nearer, and began to throw a path of light in front of it. Then it glanced on the framework of the mill sails, then on to the lower supports, and next crept over the girl’s head and ruffled hair. When she observed the light, she stood up straight, full of curiosity, but the glow-worm at once stopped at some distance, as if frightened.

Through the dark night, and the howling wind which swept up against the mill in continual gusts, two human creatures gazed over at each other,

blessing the comforting divine light without which they would not have found each other. But it was only for the first moment that more peaceful feelings were awakened in the girl, for she clasped the beams against which she leaned with both her arms, and heedless of her dripping skirts, she called out to her rescuer in a tone that plainly showed she should regard any interference with hostility—

“Hann, what are you doing here?”

“Is it you, Lina?”

“You see it is.”

Hann breathed more freely, and the glow-worm crept a step nearer. Its rays struck the girl's feet—her skirts, from which the water poured off.

Hann started as if in sudden pain, and it came upon him that he might perhaps have prevented all this trouble and mischief. He lifted up the lantern, thinking to throw the light on Lina's face, which he had not seen for so long, when she called out again, only more sharply and bitterly, and as if to protect herself against the peasant's sympathy—

“Hann, how do you come to be about here at this time? What are you doing?”

“I? Oh, Lina——”

And the fisherman who never lied, felt that at any cost he must not confess that he had been following her.

“Oh—Lina,” he burst out, speaking the truth, in spite of everything, “I lost something here.”

“You?” She leaned farther over the wooden beams which she had put as a protection between them, and vehemently shook her head.

"It must have been something very valuable," she said scornfully. But to herself she owned how good it was to speak to a creature of flesh and blood, even if it was only Hann.

"Was it something very valuable?" she shouted again, and stamped her feet, for it irritated her to think that perhaps they already knew of her shame in the little house, and that this lout had been looking for her.

"Something valuable?" Hann repeated gloomily, and gazed through the darkness at her wet skirts, from which the water dripped unceasingly. "Lina, no one likes to lose things. But you——" In his simplicity he determined to conquer her suspicions. He went on: "It's a good thing I met you just here, for I suppose you were coming to see us."

He forgot that Moorluke Church clock had just struck eleven, and that you could not see your hand before your eyes in this stormy night.

But Lina was only the more angered by the goodness of heart that so plainly sought to spare her.

"What's it to do with you where I'm going?" she shouted down to him vehemently, striking the wood in her rage. Oh, how she wanted to annoy these people, who hurt her self-esteem! And on the other hand, how greatly she wished to be saved! But such is life.

In his misery about the erring girl Hann paid no heed to her anger. Slowly, carefully, as if each step might hurt her, he crept nearer, until at last he was able to put the lantern between himself and the

girl on the wooden supports. The frozen creature held both hands over the light, for she greedily accepted every gift life had to offer.

They presented a strange picture—the shivering girl with the tumbled hair and the wild, unsteady look, and opposite her the clumsy man in his loose sailor's jacket, and his bent head, both under the mill, and lighted by the lantern.

"Lina," Hann began again, for he feared lest his valuable catch might slip out of the net again, "it is a good thing I met you here, for of course you were coming to us, and as the bridge is broken, I must take you across on the ferry."

"Really? Is it broken?" she repeated scornfully.

But Hann was firm, stood close to the wooden beams, so that the flickering light hovered over his face from below.

"Of course it's broken. Have you forgotten, Lina? But you've heard surely of our misfortunes, and were coming to comfort the mother. Isn't it so?"

The circle of light in which they stood was so bright that the suspicious girl recognised in Hann's eyes, which were turned straight upon her, that he knew everything. Oh! she could have struck him in the face with her clenched fist.

"Why do you make pretty speeches?" she replied, gripping him by the arm. "You know well enough that I knew everything long before you did. Why do you do it?"

Hann stopped. "Lina, I thought perhaps you didn't know. And then you've heard, of course,

that the cows, the boats, and the house are to be sold?"

"The house too?" Lina repeated in terror, while she involuntarily looked across at the lighted windows.

"Yes, the house too, and we shall rent a room and a kitchen at Claus Muchow's."

When he described this break-up, Lina's heart began to beat wildly again, and she lifted her finger to her mouth and bit it. Wild despair seized her. Why—oh, why had she not vanished beneath the rushes just now? Only one step was needed, and the bed would have been so soft. No, no, she would hear nothing more. With a movement in which her whole body seemed to writhe she rushed from the wooden supports, and the next moment would have disappeared in the darkness had not Hann in his agony jumped the cross-bar and held her fast by both arms in a firm, clinging grip, under which in increasing rage she turned and twisted.

"What do you mean? Let me go."

"There are so many deep holes here. I was afraid you might fall."

"That's not true. You know it. You want something of me."

"Lina, come to the lantern."

"Let me go."

"Lina, I can't let you go. You see it's night. I—I think you've quarrelled with Fräulein Dewitz."

"Oh, do you?"

She laughed and screamed.

"And now that the mother's so wretched, you—— Or if you won't come to us, Paul said something

about taking you with him to Walsin. Would you like that?"

She had now shaken herself free, and thrust him back.

"To Paul? To the vicarage?"

In one leap she reached the lantern, and with a shrill scream, from which her despair robbed everything womanly, she lifted the light up high in front of Hann's face to see if he was daring to jest with her. But the lad's blue eyes gazed at her so sorrowfully that the lantern suddenly fell to the ground with a crash.

She turned giddy, the mill seemed to rock to and fro before her for a moment, the darkness danced in front of her so that she was obliged to sit down on one of the beams. Anger, anxiety, and exhaustion had taken away all desires; her hands sank powerless in her lap, and her head bent over to the side, so that Hann in terror had to support it in both his hands.

"To mother?" she murmured, as if dreaming.

"Yes, Lina; or to Paul."

"Come here, Hann; I want to tell you something."

When he bent down to her, she put her mouth close to his ear to whisper something. But involuntarily she stopped.

"First put the lantern behind us."

He obeyed her in silence. Both crouched down trembling, darkness in front of them, light behind them. Then again she put her lips to his ear, and whispered something, first stammering, then more firmly, and at last angrily like a complaint. It was

the reason why she must keep away from a pastor's house for ever—it was her fate.

Hann sat silent with bent head, ever more deeply absorbed. He just nodded and nodded, and as often as she paused to observe him he nodded more emphatically, like some one who is being told something pleasing, or a thing that is a matter of course. The hour had come to the poor lad in which the human heart slowly begins to blossom, and is never again quite barren.

And he nodded more and more seriously and sympathetically.

“Can I go back?” she asked as she ended.

“Lina,” he replied in low tones, “I’m surprised at that question. What is one’s parents’ house for except as a shelter in good times and bad? If it were otherwise, I should set no value on it. Come along, Lina.”

A quarter of an hour later oars might have been heard splashing in the river. Hann was taking his foster-sister home. As her foot touched the threshold she started back, and all at once the night seemed preferable to the narrow, fishy-smelling cottage, but Hann pushed her gently into the passage. It was pitch dark there. Lina in terror pressed closely against him. And when he shut the door very quietly, so that his mother might not be disturbed, he suddenly felt a soft hand stroke his cheek, and heard near him a low sobbing.

“Oh, Lina!” he murmured in confusion, his heart beating wildly.

But her contrition only lasted for a moment.

Though he could not see in the darkness, the fisherman heard the girl take a quick breath, and then she asked with decision—

“Hann, you’ll keep your promise?”

“Of course, Lina.”

“All right, then. I’ll go up to my old room, and speak to mother to-morrow. Good-night.”

“Good-night, Lina. Sleep well—it’s the first night that you’re sleeping here again, you know.”

“Yes; you must go to bed too, Hann.”

Then light footsteps crept up the stairs. Hann listened to them, then gripped at his heart as if something was wrong there. He sighed heavily.

He had extinguished the lantern outside the house, so that his mother, who now slept in the large room next the passage, might not be disturbed by the light. But the sick woman must have heard them come in, for a low trembling voice sounded through the door—

“Hann, is it you?”

“Yes, mother.”

A sigh came from the room.

“Is anything the matter, mother?”

“No, my boy—but Siebenbrod—he hasn’t come back yet.”

“Don’t worry, mother. I won’t lock the door. I’ll wait here.”

The sick woman said nothing to this proposal—she tossed about a little, and then all was quiet.

In the passage stood a blue painted wooden trunk, the only property that Siebenbrod had brought with him at the time of his marriage. Hann sat down on it, stuck his elbows on his knees, and held his night-

watch. Outside the wind groaned, whistled, and howled. The clock struck the quarters, the river murmured noisily, and the poplars creaked and shook in the blast. Hann let his thoughts wander. They were sad thoughts, which he followed unwillingly.

She was asleep now up there. And he, although he was engaged to Clara, had daily longed that the room should be again occupied by its former possessor. Here his thoughts turned to the time when the anchor struck him and Clara Toll had nursed him.

"Oh, Clara!"

He sat still and listened for a light tread on the stairs. For he did not trust Lina. In spite of all her promises, she might take it into her head to escape. So he continued to listen for a long time, but nothing stirred, only the cat crept past on its velvet paws.

Sorrowfully Hann let his thoughts have their way.

Dear God, in what manner had the companion of his youth, whom he had loved so deeply, returned home? In shame and misery. And who was to blame? His brother Bruno, who ought to have respected her. He thought further, and asked himself: "Is she really bad?—worse than formerly? Who can tell? I don't know. For I have never experienced anything like it. It seems to me that whoever judges anything ought himself to have gone through it. Isn't it strange that 'bad' should be what people think so much about, and even desire? And indeed it's no small merit to have given a new creature to the world. And when I think of it, even Siebenbrod shows joy when a cow calves, and yet many people object to

the arrival of a new-born infant, surely worth much more than a calf. Oh fie! Anyway, I'll look after it."

But the words "look after" fell sadly on his heart, and he thought how much he had taken upon himself in regard to Lina. How different she was from what he had imagined!—how wild and angry, and not at all humble! And what conditions she had made before she had allowed him to put her in the boat. He sighed. She was quite different from what he had always thought—just as a good woman ought not to be, for she only thought of herself. And how would things go these next days? To-morrow, when Siebenbrod discovered the new inmate? Outside, the village clock struck one. So late already, and yet Siebenbrod wasn't back. Hann got up off the trunk, walked up and down for a bit to stretch his legs, and then went back to his place. It had just struck two when he jumped up again.

Good God, it was beginning to get light. Another summer morning announced itself through the glass at the top of the house-door. Outside, the swallows twittered, and the early morning breeze blew over the river. But in the passage it was still dark, and only the red tiles showed indistinctly through the gloom.

Had Siebenbrod come back? Tired out, Hann got up, and was just about to listen quietly at the door of his mother's room, when he caught sight of something in the corner behind the house-door. In hesitation he stood up straight, looked round him, rubbed his eyes, and again stared at the corner which the spiders had filled with their grey webs.

"Good God!" He called softly, "Siebenbrod." Nothing stirred. What was he doing? There he stood in the corner, his broad back turned to Hann, and so extraordinarily tall!

Once more Hann called out to him in a hoarse voice, that he could scarcely bring out of his throat; but the giant did not stir. He stood, two heads taller than Hann, his shaggy head with its black hair, from which the cap had slipped off, turned close to the corner, as if he was ashamed.

"Jesus — Christ!" said Hann slowly, his arms stretched out as if to protect himself from the ghost. But he crept nearer, until he could touch the giant's back with his finger.

"Siebenbrod, Siebenbrod, why are you so tall to-day? God have mercy, Siebenbrod, you're standing in the air."

When no answer came, and the figure under the pressure of Hann's fingers swung to and fro, the lad, in his terror, sought the last means which, as he remembered, old Kusemann had declared infallible. He quickly tore out three hairs from the hanging man and laid them in the form of the Cross at his feet. But Siebenbrod went swinging on, quite insensible to Hann's magic.

Then Hann made short work, and cut him down.

When day dawned there lay before the blue trunk, which was the sole property the boatman had brought at the time of his marriage, a piece of brown sailcloth under which the outlines of a stretched-out body showed indistinctly. Hann sat on the trunk and

watched the corpse. And he looked down at it and asked himself—

“There he lies so quietly, as still as a stone, and yet he will arise again. And when mother gets to heaven, she’ll find two husbands there. Is that all right? Would the love of God be less if this meeting again was merely a fairy story used by the pastors by way of consolation? I don’t know. But listen how all the cocks are crowing out of doors !

“Oh, Siebenbrod, the other fishermen are now dismantling their boats and going to rest, and you’ve gone away from it all. That’s very wrong, and men won’t pardon it. For I think that all the other gifts of God are to be obtained only through life. And I can’t help thinking that life itself is after all the highest happiness. Never to have seen the sun and the stars and the water, and never to have heard a human voice,—Lina’s, for example,—why, that would be worse than anything. Look, Siebenbrod, to throw all that away—no, I tell you, it’s worse than a sin, it’s stupid.”

And as he spoke, the cock crowed loudly and full of life, and the morning light fell more and more brightly on the brown sailcloth.

CHAPTER V

THE WORKING OF THE NEW RÉGIME

IT was two months later.

Claus Muchow, fisherman and giant, the owner of the little cottage in which Hann and Lina now rented rooms, sat in the kitchen on a stool, clinging with outstretched arms to two iron hooks firmly fixed in the light-blue wall, because otherwise his wife could not possibly pull off his enormous fishing-boots, which clung to his feet like pitch.

"No," sighed Frau Sophie, after some vain attempts; and the big-boned woman, who was in fact a fair-haired giantess, wiped away the perspiration. "If I hadn't been accustomed to do this for you for thirty years, and you hadn't broken all my bootjacks, I wouldn't do it any more. You want an engine or a couple of horses."

The giant grinned amiably, pressed his lips tightly together, and tried to hold on harder to the hooks but only succeeded in tearing them out. He got very angry, looked at the foot-long iron spokes, threw them violently into the wood basket, and roared so that the little room, scarcely seven feet high, shook: "Blacking—blackening!"

"You're right," said Frau Sophie quietly; "the smith did not put them in properly."

It might be imagined that Frau Sophie here made an illogical reply, for the giant apparently wanted blacking, from the use of which he perhaps expected to get free of his big boots. But whoever thinks that shows that he does not know the strongest couple in Moorluke, for Frau Sophie's iron fist had just pulled them off, and her husband roared in tones of joy—

“Pancakes—pancakes!”

There Claus Muchow's vocabulary ended, for he was deaf and dumb, and it was only with infinite trouble that Frau Sophie had at length succeeded in teaching him the two words which did duty for every expression of feeling.

Claus Muchow was the most amiable of men; he loved everybody and everything, with the exception of a bottle of blacking, which once in the darkness, and in his wife's absence, he had chanced to taste, and then threw from him in holiest horror. To that disturbance of mind he owed the word “blacking,” which henceforth stood for everything that he considered bad: the devil—a torn net—a drunken old woman—stomach-ache—were all “blacking.”

On the other hand, his stomach and palate had provided him with a word to express beauty and goodness. Pancakes formed his favourite dish, for the giant was an epicure, and as no one made them so well as Frau Sophie, pancakes stood for everything good—heaven—tobacco—a dance with Frau Sophie when floor and roof were firm enough to admit of such a dissipation—a comfortable seat in church—their savings—and a blow of the fist which

old Kusemann had to receive on account of his lies.

The most remarkable thing about this marriage was that Claus Muchow had only to look at his wife's lips, or to follow her vehement gestures, in order to understand every single word she said.

"Now, then," said Frau Sophie, her husband having meanwhile put on a pair of wooden slippers, and now comfortably reposed, coffee-cup in hand, "had a good catch to-day?"

Claus Muchow swallowed his coffee noisily and shook his fair curly head crossly.

"Never mind," said his wife consolingly, and struck his knee violently by way of a tender caress; "it doesn't matter. We got some money yesterday for the curing; we mustn't expect too much."

The fisherman grunted a sort of assent, and ceased drinking. He put the cup down, pointed to the partition wall, shut his eyes, and snored loudly for a moment. Frau Sophie, who was busy at the fire, shook her head and said—

"No, she's not up yet. She can't get over the late rising of the luxurious life she used to lead."

"Pancakes," murmured Claus sympathetically, and made a sign as if stroking with his hand.

"Yes, yes, I understand," continued Frau Sophie. "You like her, and they've both been through a lot of trouble. First losing their bit of property, then the unfortunate affair with their stepfather, who hanged himself. Two days later there was a second corpse in the house. Crippled old Frau Klüth—well, Siebenbrod's death settled her; and to end, the girl's

condition—O God! O God!—what can one say about it all? But I think she should now suit herself to her circumstances, and not pretend to be a fine lady any more. Listen, there's seven striking, and she's still asleep. If she accepts her keep from a fisherman, she ought to live like a fisherwoman."

She stopped, for Claus grunted, and made signs as if he had two knitting-needles in his hands.

"Yes, yes," interpreted Frau Sophie, "I know what you mean. A few days ago she began to knit new stockings for Hann. But that's work for fine ladies. Her Fräulein Dewitz was a sewing-mistress; of course she understands that sort of thing."

"Hüh—hüh!" growled Claus, and made signs with his right arm as if stirring something, and peeped under the lids of the saucepans on the stove.

"Ah yes," said Frau Sophie, "you mean that she's been cooking for him. That was a great success! She wasted half a pound of my good butter. She's not attempted anything of the sort again. And now"—here she turned round, her hands on her hips—"I must tell you something. But you never have anything to say in reply. The harbour-master's wife was here yesterday, and brought me baby's clothes to wash. And over the little shirts we got on to that—to that what's"—and Frau Sophie pointed to the partition wall—"expected there. And then we discussed whether it was seemly that such a thing should happen in my house. And the harbour-master's wife thought that for a woman like me it was immoral. And I ask every one, haven't I always been a cleanly woman,

even to washing myself? And now I'm to harbour immorality in my house? No, Claus, either, or—I say no more; I say simply—either—or——”

But Claus Muchow, who was attracted by his lodger's delicate, refined face, got up, so that his head nearly struck the ceiling, stretched out his arm, and roared—

“Blacking!”

“No!” shouted Frau Sophie; “this time I won't give in. The girl shall go.”

“Blacking!” shouted Claus, crimson in the face, throwing a saucepan on to the floor.

“Very well,” laughed his wife, in a towering rage. She seized a saucepan, but prudently a smaller one, and dashed it on the ground.

“She shall leave my house!” she raged. “And I see now, the devil brought her here—none other than the devil.”

A firm belief in the devil was one of Frau Sophie's peculiarities. She thought she saw him crawling about everywhere—in her cupboards, in the street, even in her bed—

“The devil—the devil!”

Their quarrel this time might have degenerated into something worse, had not an organ begun to play suddenly in the village street. And the Italian sang to it—

“You're dear to my heart,
You're dear to my soul.”

Claus Muchow saw him just through the kitchen window. He opened his eyes wide.

There is something reconciling about music, and especially for this couple, who loved singing and dancing with all their hearts. A happy smile broke over the man's features. Although he could not hear the melody, he lifted his right leg. Then his wife could resist no longer. She dropped the spoon she had in her hand, and leaned against the fisherman's shoulder.

"Ah, what pain you cause me !
You do not know how I love you."

They laughed, grasped each other's hands, and began to turn round. Lina and the devil were forgotten. They danced.

.

An hour later Lina rose from her couch. She looked discontentedly round the narrow slip of a place which Hann, following Frau Sophie's example, called a little room ; contemptuously she pulled the bedclothes to rights on the sloping shelf that served her for a bed, while Hann had to content himself with a garret, and then sat down before a piece of broken looking-glass which stood on a rough pinewood chest of drawers, in order to do her hair.

She made great haste, because the day seemed already somewhat advanced, and Hann might return from his fishing at any moment. She quickly put on her blouse, and with a sigh fastened it tightly. In the distance the organ could be heard playing in the village street. She opened the low window and leaned out for a moment. But the Muchows' cottage lay far from the village, and its windows looked straight on to the meadows and the Bodden.

Lina frowned. The sounds of the organ were very indistinct. The sea moved in a blue shimmer, the damp meadow grass glittered in the brilliant sunshine, and a swarm of brown and yellow butterflies swung in the still air, but Lina saw none of it.

The loneliness of it all! She clenched her hands, pressed them against her forehead, and turned violently away, as if the calmness out of doors hurt her.

Meanwhile a pungent smell of fish came through from the next room. The smell was horrible. As a child, even, she had a special dislike to it, and now, when it was never absent—now it seemed to her almost unendurable.

She sat down on a stool by the window and gazed at the sea.

Oh, how nice and sweet everything had smelt at Fräulein Dewitz's! Every Saturday, after the great cleaning, lavender water had been sprinkled about. And here——?

This horrid little cottage! And these illiterate fisherfolk. She knew perfectly well that she was a thorn in the woman's side, for Lina's fate had been gossiped about. People whispered together without actually knowing anything. Lina bit her lip, and slowly clenched her hands.

Why—why did the months pass so slowly? How long was she to stay here? When would she be free? She counted on her fingers. For she wouldn't stay here a day longer than needful. It was only a hiding-place for her—a refuge. Nothing bound her to

it! What about Hann, however? She shrugged her shoulders. Of course she knew that it gave Hann the greatest joy in life to dare to look into her face. It was ridiculous,—she did nothing to encourage it,—but it was the way of this peasant, so unlike her. And then she thought—well, he might be allowed as much, it hurt nobody; and Hann must, after all, be grateful to her for sharing this wretched hut with him.

“Good-morning, young lady,” sounded from outside.

Lina started. Old Kusemann was passing along the meadow path to the jetty; he raised his pilot’s cap with exaggerated politeness, and asked in kindly tones—

“Well, are you getting on nicely, Miss Lina?”

Lina looked at him, turned crimson, and shut the window with a bang.

“See, how pretty!” said the pilot, undisturbed by her anger, and walked past her backwards, bowing, like a crab. “That sort of temper doesn’t last. It’s her condition that causes it. I’ll come round and see you some evening, Miss Lina.” And so saying he walked away with a dignified air.

“What a creature!”

Lina clawed angrily at her apron.

He was the only person who inquired after her. Paul, the new pastor, who was now settled officially at the Walsin, certainly came to see his brother occasionally; but whenever he did, Lina always rushed into Hann’s garret, or ran out through the kitchen to the meadows, in order not to meet the clergyman. She had gone neither to Siebenbrod’s nor to the

mother's funeral, but had crawled in terror to the garret of the old house that now belonged to the barber. And no one had asked after her. Even Hann seemed to consider her hiding away quite natural, and had never referred to it.

The lonely girl laughed scornfully.

Why didn't Fräulein Dewitz come and see her? Oh, well, let her stay where she was! She might have inquired about her once! It was the old lady's duty. And neither Hollander the Consul, nor Dina!

Lina suddenly covered her eyes with her hand, for she was overpowered by the feeling of being an out-cast; and then, as if ashamed of the brief giving way, she seized the fragment of looking-glass and hurled it violently to the ground. It was all the fault of Hann and this wretched cottage.

"Lie there!"

The splinters flew around.

"Lina!" said Hann reproachfully, stopping short in the low doorway. He carried a damp net in his hand. The water ran down from his big fishing-boots.

"Good-morning, Lina," he went on, after waiting a little.

"Good-morning," she replied indifferently, heedless of the broken fragments, and raised her arms in order to fasten her loosened hair.

"Something annoyed you?" asked Hann, while he continued to look at the pieces, and without putting the net down. Lina moved backwards and forwards on her chair. Did he mean to scold her?

"No," she replied, turning away, while she looked out of the window; "I did it because I was bored."

"Because you were bored, Lina?"

Hann let the net glide to the ground, passed his hand over his hair, and in deep melancholy bent his head in thought.

As long as they had been living like this, he had striven night and day to bring her to better ways, and yet had not ventured to give her a word of blame. She was so brusque, and was so much above him, notwithstanding her misfortunes. But to-day, when he had only caught a few herrings—a few wretched pence—to-day, when his pressing poverty became plainer than ever, he determined to describe his position to her.

Perhaps the young woman whom he liked so much to look at, would be accessible to a request.

"You were bored, Lina," he began, with an effort. "Well, then, suppose you were to occupy yourself with something, to cook for both of us, for instance. That would be capital. I catch so little nowadays. I seem to be ever so much stupider than the other fishermen. And I must pay the Muchows for our keep. But if you would prepare our food, that would be a great help to me. Of course, it's only an idea of mine," he went on anxiously, when he saw how Lina wrinkled up her white brow. "Only an idea, Lina," he repeated gently. But she twisted her chair round and rubbed her hands.

"But why should I do it?" she asked, in hostile irritation. "Hann, say yourself, why should I go

into the kitchen with the fishwife and smell the grease which I loathe, since I'm only going to be here a very short time? I'd rather sell the clothes and the few bits of jewellery Fräulein Dewitz sent after me. Do you hear? They're there—in the cupboard. Take them."

"God forbid, Lina, that I should do such a thing."

"There, take the booty."

"As if I would touch your things!"—defending himself with both his hands. "No, Lina; if you don't like it, of course it won't do. I only meant that occupation changes one's thoughts so nicely."

She looked at him almost malignantly. "I've not got any thoughts about anything, Hann. So take the things, and don't scold any more. You won't make me any different from what I am."

The fisherman let his head sink on his breast, and gave a deep sigh. "Don't be angry, Lina," he managed to say at last; "the idea only passed through my mind." Then he looked shyly at a chair which stood in a corner.

"May I sit down here for a little, Lina?" he asked, after an interval of silence.

She had already put her arm on the window-sill again, and nodded shortly.

He sat down on the creaking chair. And a pause ensued in which he considered why he should spend his whole life in order to make a human being more amenable, in whom it was certainly not possible to change anything. But that was just the mystery of this unpractical, imaginative child of nature—that he had come to the conclusion that happiness resided

in a woman. And it was just this particular woman. Some dark, unknown impulse led him to her.

"Lina," he began at length, "have you drunk all the coffee?"

"Yes," she murmured through her fingers.

"Is any left for me?"

"I don't know. But," she added, shrugging her shoulders, "I can go and see."

"Yes, do, please," agreed Hann, secretly delighted.

After a while, the girl came back from the kitchen with a cup, which Hann carefully took from her.

"What a nice cupful!" he praised, flattered, and in his gratitude made a clumsy movement as if about to stroke her hand gently; but Lina drew haughtily back.

"Don't do that."

"I wasn't going to do anything, Lina," he whispered in terror.

For a time nothing was heard but the sound of Hann drinking and the buzzing of the flies on the ceiling. Then suddenly Lina turned from the window and said—

"Weren't you in the town yesterday?"

"Yes—why, Lina?" asked Hann, surprised at this fresh testimony of sympathy.

"Oh, I thought you might have heard something," she continued, in semi-despair. She jumped up and stretched her arms. "I thought you might have heard something interesting."

Hann looked at her sorrowfully.

"You can't get accustomed to living here, Lina," he uttered sadly.

"No, Hann, you know I can't. I could hardly bear it here when I was a child."

"Yes, yes, Lina; I remember."

His lips trembled, and when he had put his cup under the chair, as was the custom among fishing-folk, he remained sitting in the same position. But Lina could no longer restrain herself. She stamped her feet with passion, and went on violently—

"I could often beat my hands against the wall that I must accept all this from you. Yes, must—yes, must!" she repeated in high anger. "And that you should have given up so much for me—I tell you, I won't have it. For example, your betrothed, Clara Toll."

Hann kept perfectly still in his corner. He only implored: "Leave Clara out of it."

"No—why? You're so well suited to her. Why doesn't she come here any more?"

"Oh, Lina, that's quite natural."

She could not understand that.

"Why? Your betrothed need not trouble herself about me. What have you told her?"

Hann slowly lifted his head. "I told her,—don't be angry, Lina,—I told her that I must now look after you, and so it would be too long an affair between us."

Lina looked immensely surprised, and half unconsciously sank down on her chair.

"And she?" she asked, and plucked uneasily at her apron. "What did she say?"

"She agreed with me in all. And to-morrow she goes to the town to take her post as nursing sister."

Then Hann stood up, folded his net, and went slowly out of the door.

For a moment it seemed as if Lina meant to call him back, but she must have reconsidered her decision, for she turned round, and in the same bad humour went on looking out of the window. She soon became aware of Claus Muchow and his wife, who with Hann were going to the boats and beginning to pack the herrings in boxes. The wind brought a pungent smell with it.

"I suppose I ought to go and help," thought Lina bitterly. "And how the woman gossips about me! No, no, if only it was all over! And then away from here!"

Dinner was eaten in the Muchows' kitchen. Frau Sophie would permit no other plan. "No," she declared, "I'll see how her ladyship likes my cooking. And so she must come out into the kitchen."

They sat round the hearth, held the porringers in their hands, and Frau Sophie and her husband kept on asserting how delicious it all was.

"Pancakes!" murmured Claus Muchow, in great content, while he embraced a whole fried herring "Pancakes!"

He dipped his enormous hand into the dish fumbled about in it, and at length drew forth the biggest of the fried herrings, and as a token of kindness to Lina, proceeded to hold it to her mouth.

"Pancakes!" he repeated several times in praise patted his stomach, and pretended to bite at the fish.

But Lina got up, put down her porringer, and

without any apology rushed out of the room, banging the door behind her.

"Well, I never!" said Frau Sophie angrily. "There's a princess, if you like! She'll never do for you, Hann."

"Oh, Frau Muchow," said Hann, by way of excuse, "she's not well, you know."

"That's got nothing to do with it."

"I assure you, Frau Muchow, she'd be quite different."

Then Hann got up, said a few words to Frau Sophie in praise of her dinner, and went after Lina.

Claus Muchow sat for a long while with his mouth open, looking by turns at the fish in his hand and at the door through which Lina had vanished. At length he came to himself, gave himself a shake, and after gulping down the fish, jumped up, and imitating Lina, tripped with affected gestures to the door. Then he pointed to his forehead with his finger, and growled out scornfully—

"Blacking—blackening!"

And Frau Sophie nodded in agreement, and observed, "You're right once more, Claus."

In the afternoon Hann sat beneath the window on a bench that he had knocked together himself out of a few rough pieces of wood, and cleaned his nets with a blunt knife. Notwithstanding the silence that reigned between them, it was a pleasant feeling that Lina, her dark head supported in both her hands, had for some time been looking through the open window at the sea and the meadows.

A smell of stale sea-weed came up from the

water. Quantities of gulls shot over the surface, and sometimes splashing with their wings scattered glittering drops into the air. A loud chirping of grasshoppers and crickets came from the rushes, which steamed in the sun.

Hann took up a second net. Then it occurred to him how unceasingly his companion gazed at the distance, as if she was trying to see far away over the misty ocean.

"I wonder if she's thinking of him," he asked himself uneasily,—“of the man who treated her so badly?”

How often with secret fear he had put the question to himself! But Lina's conduct afforded no answer. She seemed to have entirely forgotten the past. She never spoke of him. Hann was once more filled with pity for her.

"Won't you come out, Lina?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"It's quite delightful out here," he urged. But she refused. She wasn't going to sit outside, where every one could see her. There it was again—this shy hiding which so moved Hann.

The fisherman bent closer over his work, and at last took courage.

"Lina," he began, stammering, and stammered more and more in order to conceal his embarrassment, "are you thinking about it?"

"About what, Hann?"

"About—about——" The name that must be so painful to her would hardly frame itself on his tongue. "About Bruno, Lina?"

She did not answer, but her head leaned still more heavily on her little hand. And her glance was again directed as if in search of something through the bright mist. After a time he asked further: "And about what is to come?"

A shadow passed over her face, and she sat perfectly still while she asked——

"Have you heard anything of him since?"

"No, not a word, Lina, or I should have told you."

She remained quite still, her eyes wide open. Suddenly she frowned, and said harshly, "Oh, he's managed to get along all right, and is again living in splendour and in joy, while I——"

Here she stopped, pressed her lips together, and looked angrily at Hann, as if he was responsible for the shattering of her plans.

That completely confused the honest fellow. "But I thought—I wanted to ask," he stammered,—“if you still love him? Lina, may I ask it?"

She got up quickly, drew herself up, and while she closed the window, she gave a bitter laugh. "You are, and always will be a great stupid, Hann. Leave me alone."

Other things likewise showed more and more that Lina had no sense of the deep feeling and of the aims of her devoted fisherman. Indeed, she made it her object to raise the height of the wall between herself and the village philosopher. Hann became bitterly aware of this through two events; his hard head could scarcely realise that his fairy princess had no sympathy for him.

August was nearing its end. One Sunday afternoon Hann was sitting comfortably in a corner of his garret, reading Fritz Reuter, which he had borrowed from the harbour-master, when he saw in the distance a beautiful figure in the blue dress of a nursing sister coming along the meadow path, and by the violent beating of his heart knew that it must be Clara Toll. He jumped up quickly, and with crimson face ran down to Lina, who as usual was lying asleep on her bed, and so great was his excitement that he forgot his shyness and gently pulled her arm.

Sleep had brought a pink colour into her cheeks; she looked so pretty as she slowly opened her black eyes. She must have had pleasant dreams, for she smiled at him. "What is it, Hann?"

"Lina, I have a favour to ask you."

She sat up. "Now—this minute?" she asked in surprise.

But he was not to be put off, and said persuasively, "Lina, Clara Toll is coming to see us. She did not say good-bye to me the day I went to the town, and now she wants to make up for it. You would do me a great favour if you wouldn't go away, but would receive her with me. Will you?"

He was so urgent that Lina got down off the bed. Shrugging her shoulders, she tidied her hair, and she could not help smiling when she saw that Hann, in spite of his embarrassment, followed her movements with open mouth.

Alas! her charm strengthened his folly every day.

"You'll do it, won't you, Lina?" he said at last coming to the matter in hand.

But she shook her head. "Why should I, Hann? What purpose is there in my listening to you two talk?"

In his distress he grasped her hand, and pressed it as if he would compel her.

"Oh!" she cried angrily.

"Lina, I don't mean to hurt you, but you must stay."

"But why should I?"

"Lina, can't you think?"

"No, how can I?"

"Well, then—I—I—I've such fear of Clara Toll."

"What?"

"Yes, fear," he murmured to himself, and shut his eyes.

She looked at him fixedly for a moment, and then, stepping back, laughed wickedly.

"You're not exactly clever, Hann," she replied. "What's your nursing sister to me? I tell you beforehand. In a few months, when I'm away from here, everything will be the same between you as before. Then she can take up her abode here, and you'll see, Hann, how beautifully she'll mend the nets, and what delicious soup she'll make out there with Frau Sophie. But why don't you arrange it all with her now? It's so simple."

She made a pert movement with her hand, and failed to observe that he stood before her with down-cast head. He stretched his big fingers towards her hands. She at once put them behind her.

"In a few months, then?" came slowly from his lips.

"Yes," she nodded nervously. "I'm counting the days."

"Yes, yes—so you are. I know. And where are you going?"

"You stupid Hann, wherever the winds blow me—only far, far from here. But look, Clara Toll's quite close to the house. How solemn she looks!—exactly like a nun. I'm going down to the rushes. And make it up with her—I assure you that's the best thing for you to do."

So saying, she went past him, and he gazed at the white boards, and beat his breast with his hand, and looked about him in confusion.

"Stupid Hann!" burst from him. "Yes, indeed, stupid Hann! O God, why hast Thou brought me into this? And why must the woman be happiness? And why must this woman who is so bad be the best of all for me? Oh, and why hast Thou given us such a little head and put into it such big riddles? What's the good of it all?"

But Lina did not go down to the sea, as she had said. She stood close behind the tall wooden fence on which gaily coloured clothes—red, white, and blue—belonging to the Muchows were hung out to dry. She waited there until she thought the girl in the blue costume had reached the front door. The bell above the door sounded its rusty peal. Lina crept on tip-toe back to the kitchen. To her great joy it was empty, and she put her ear to the door leading into the next room. She must hear—and inwardly she was greatly amused—what the two stupid

creatures had to say to each other. She peeped through the crack in the door. Hann stood inside in his Sunday clothes, and made Clara a kind of embarrassed bow as she entered.

"How do you do, Hann?" said the visitor in kindly tones.

Lina heard how Hann found no answer, but gazed in silence at the girl's pretty costume, which in his eyes lent her something refined and sacred.

"Yes," said Clara, who must have observed his admiration, "this is our Sunday dress—week-days we are not so fine."

The fisherman motioned the girl to sit down on the chair by the window, Lina's usual place. He stood in front of her, scarcely moving, only now and then slowly pushing his hair back.

"He's afraid, the stupid boy," thought the listener. "What a clumsy creature!"

She was about to leave her post of observation, when she heard Clara say—

"I wanted to see how you were getting on, Hann."

"Oh, Clara!"

He looked at her, his heart full of gratitude, for he was not accustomed for people to trouble about him. How prettily her brown hair curled beneath the flap of the white cap! How quiet and peaceful she looked!

"I thought, Clara," he began, with difficulty having made up his mind, "you wouldn't—come any more," he intended to say, but it occurred to him that it might be better to avoid all reference to the past, and so he offered her his hand, and merely asked—

"Clara, how are you getting on among all the sick folk? Isn't it too hard for you?"

A smile passed over her face, which he noticed had lost its pretty pink colour, and her eyes shone, as she replied—

"Hann, I can't understand how people call it work. To me it's as if I was always allowed to live in church."

"In church, Clara? Do people pray there?"

"Yes, Hann. Many pray there, and quite differently from the way in which people who are well pray. If only you could hear it! But it isn't that alone. When you sit beside those who are very ill, whom the doctors have already given up, and for whom everything depends on God's help, and when you see that neither striving nor hoping can be of any use, and it seems as though suddenly a higher Power stands by the bed, and shakes His head,—oh, Hann, it is as if your heart must freeze up for very helplessness and awe. But then there's the other side; the impossible happens, and light comes again into the half-shut eyes that were already looking into heaven, and you see that there must be something there that pours life through the parched lips, Hann,—I can't describe to you the joy that enters the little room. You seem to hear the angels singing in the distance, and you almost listen for God's footsteps."

Clara smiled happily at these words, and her eyes beamed as if they were looking into some peaceful, sunny garden.

Half enviously, but admiringly, Hann looked at her. Then he said simply—

"How religious you are!"

"That's not religion, Hann; I've experienced it all."

"Yes, to derive religion from life, that's the real truth."

And he nodded, wrapt in his own thoughts. For a long time Lina outside heard no more talking. And again she could not restrain a mocking expression because they had nothing to talk about except illness and praying.

"Fie!" she said to herself, "it smells of the hospital. What a wearisome creature she is!"

But she put her ear again to the keyhole, for she heard Clara, after some hesitation, ask the man to whom she had once been betrothed, about his life, his plans, his whole existence.

"Now it's coming," thought Lina; "she's not so stupid, after all."

"Oh, Clara," replied Hann, "how kind it is of you to ask!"

"Why, Hann, I feel as if I must always interest myself in you."

He took a deep breath, and returned, pleased—

"It's just the same with me about you, Clara."

"Yes, I know, Hann, and I can't help still being very fond of you."

He took her hand and stammered—

"Do you see—to be fond of—yes, that's it, to be fond of—so am I, Clara, as I couldn't be of any one else. But see—I'm dreadfully ashamed to utter it—is it not terribly badly arranged in the human heart that you can be sincerely fond of one woman while the other has the charm?"

"What charm, Hann?"

He asked her if she remembered old Kusemann's story of the love-witch. She was called Venus or Friga. The pilot himself wasn't exactly sure. "But in any case she's now an old woman, and sits somewhere on the chalk rocks under a split fir tree. And when she wants to play a nice little game, she cuts off two young twigs by the light of the full moon, and writes two names on them. Just those most unsuited to one another. Like Lina's and mine. And then she ties them together, throws them into the sea, and murmurs something in her beard, so that a pike comes along and swallows the twigs. And as long as the pike isn't caught and cut up, and the light of day doesn't shine upon the twigs again, so long, Clara, the couple do not and will not come together."

She turned her clear glance on him.

"And is it like that with you?" she inquired. Deep compassion sounded in her voice.

He fetched a long breath, and wrung his hands.

"Yes, Clara," he returned dully. "That's how 'tis with me. The light of day won't fall on me."

"And the twigs don't suit together?"

"No, Clara, they don't."

"You know it for certain?"

"Yes, for certain sure."

"Poor Hann!"

He wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Yes, Clara, what can help me? Praying's no good. I'll tell you something very strange. All the trouble and misery she brings on me, it seems as if

on that account I must only serve her the more. And there's no end to it—no end."

"No end, Hann?"

A tear began to form in Clara's eye. It looked like a dewdrop lying on a purple violet. Then the girl took her friend's hand and stroked it gently.

"Hann, I hope it may have a happy end."

He shook his head gloomily.

"Clara, you see yourself. It can't have a happy end. I only wish that things may remain as they are now."

She got up. Both held out their hands to say good-bye.

"Will you come again soon?" he asked shyly.

She nodded with reserve.

"Yes, Hann, if you wish it. I feel as if you were one of my sick people."

He put his hands on her shoulders, and so heavily that it hurt her, and at last he brought out with difficulty—

"I wish you sat by my bedside, and the Holy One whom you mentioned just now would shake His head, and you would close my eyes with your dear fingers. Good-bye, Clara."

Then he pushed her from him almost violently. And when the door-bell had rung over her head, she hurried off, softly sobbing.

But another woman leaned against the kitchen door. She stretched out her hand against the adjoining room, out of which something seemed to attract her like a compelling power, and a pair of bloodless lips murmured, "No—no."

In the evening, Lina sat on the shingle. The stars twinkled in the sky, little waves murmured at her feet. They ran up to her, chattering, and as they ran back again, they seemed to lisp and whisper always the same words: "Poor Hann!"

The young woman sighed and pushed back her hair, which the sea breeze loosened, and looked up into the round vault above her. The moon was at the full. This was the time when the witch tied the twigs together. The young woman shook herself and sighed.

A voice called from the dark cottage: "Lina—Lina—where are you? The night air isn't good for you."

She jumped up, dashed away a drop just running off her eyelid with her finger, and taking a round-about way, so that the dark figure searching for her could not catch her, ran into the house.

CHAPTER VI

LINA'S VAGARIES

SINCE then, things had somewhat improved in the little cottage. Lina behaved better in Hann's presence, she controlled her angry moods whenever she thought of it. She left off quarrelling with Frau Sophie, sat quietly at meals on her wooden stool, and only when the Muchows made themselves too unpleasant, when they sang, or stamped with their feet, a gleam came into her eyes ready to fly out. But the others observed nothing of it.

Only Hann felt with astonishment, gradually with a beating heart, later with anxiety and premature joy, that something was different.

Winter came. One morning a white pall covered Moorluke. The snow reached up to the chimney of the Muchows' cottage. A way had to be cut through the snow if the men wished to go out. The sea, too, showed a desire to encroach. It pressed forward, dashing fragments of ice against the doors and walls of the buildings on the shore. And one morning the whole group of cottages was caught and surrounded by a wall of ice.

"Blacking—blackening!" shouted Claus Muchow in anger, as the men wielded their ice-axes.

The line of cottages became more lonely than ever.

Amid the snow-heaps it lay cut off from all the world. The paths which led across the meadows had long disappeared. It was one vast shining plain, white, untrodden, which stretched right over the Bodden. No one knew where the boundary between land and water lay. Even the church bell which used to call loudly over to the lonely little community was frozen, and only groaned occasionally, like a hoarse giant who was wearing a thick comforter.

It became ever more peaceful. Lina liked it. Her time of trial was drawing nearer and nearer, and with it the desire to hide herself, to avoid every strange face, to sit, her head supported by her hands, and to think.

It was a new mood in her. Formerly she had run through the world seeking enjoyment, and the earth lay in the glow of dawn—now it was dark, and bats flew around. Those were her thoughts which sought to explain the world. And by degrees Hann, who on account of the severe winter was almost always at home,—on account of the Cimmerian gloom which brooded over the Baltic Sea,—by degrees the clumsy figure sitting all of a heap on the chair, a fishing net in his hand, became dearer to her.

The days grew darker and drearier, the hours gloomier and more oppressive. Lina's defiance was at an end; as she cowered in her corner, suddenly anxiety, fear, terror of all living creatures, arose before her, and seemed to reach out to grasp her. Then she threw up her hands; her voice trembled with terror—

"Hann, are you there still?"

"Yes, Lina, I'm here."

"Then let us have some light, Hann."

Hann got up, felt about, and very soon the yellow flame of the candle showed itself on the little table. Trembling shadows played around.

A deep sigh came from Lina's corner, and Hann saw with sorrow how the dark eyes burned in the pale face.

She sat up straight.

"Hann, don't you hear something tapping at the window?"

"Only the snow, Lina."

"It's covered up the whole window?"

"Yes, Lina; I can only see the room and you."

She leaned back farther into the corner, and gazed at him. Then putting her elbows on her knees, and shivering, perhaps with the cold, she asked quickly—

"Hann, do you know what I'm thinking of?"

"No, Lina,—how should I?"

Covering her eyes, she said—

"Hann, I mean if I had died young, I should have been spared much trouble. You too—both of us—poor Hann!"

It was the first time that she had said aloud the words which never left her. He started, and looked over to her shyly. Her unusual words had pricked his heart as if with a thorn, and at the same time it seemed as if the blood was wiped away with a soft flower-petal.

But she had soon forgotten her neighbour.

"It would be such a good thing," she continued, stammering.

"What, Lina?"

"If the new-born babes could be saved from all this."

Hann raised his face. It had become much more wrinkled, but neither Lina nor he had noticed it. Only Clara Toll saw it.

"Lina, who could save them?" And his eyes, usually so compassionate, became earnest.

"The mothers, Hann,—the mothers must do it. Oh, such a little coffin is really a cradle. And think what would sleep with them—all the future evil thoughts and deeds. For whoever thinks, wishes, and a wish is generally bad."

But Hann was angry. This desolating view deprived him of the whole edifice of his philosophy of life. He threw the net over his knees, shook his head violently, and said, speaking very fast—

"Lina, you mustn't talk like that—you mustn't really. In the first place, if God wished that, why should He send the little children? And, Lina, would there be less evil in the world? I don't think so. And Lina, I've always thought that God has arranged things very oddly with regard to men, extraordinarily oddly. For see, Lina, everybody says that a little child, a tiny little worm in swaddling clothes, is the very best of human creatures—entirely innocent, so to say, direct from Paradise. But, Lina, I say it isn't true. A new-born infant is more bad than good. Why? Well, you know that it's as stupid as straw. But it's bad in other ways: it scratches like a cat; it takes what doesn't belong to it; it's selfish, and loves

nobody but itself. Isn't that true? I tell you, it is true. And what more? Then comes God, and from the beginning He has endowed every human creature with an extraordinary power to improve. Also to deteriorate, but still more to improve. That lies in us, Lina; one often feels it strongly. And now just consider, how through this power the new-born babe improves—nearly always improves; for good is always stronger than evil. First he learns to speak, and then to love, and then to think, and so on, till at last he thinks out the great things that are to be of use to other men. And, Lina, mustn't you keep these little things so that they may improve? You surely wouldn't have them delivered to the grave as wretched and miserable as they are in the beginning? I tell you, then the worms that come out after rain would make one feel very uncomfortable."

Lina drew back, always farther into her corner, so that the candle-rays hardly reached her. But she opened her eyes wide, and looked at the fisherman with an expression of wonder, as in their early days when the boy said something that suited ill with his condition.

The snow beat unceasingly against the window-panes, the cries of gulls and ravens were heard outside, the net went on being mended. There was entire silence between the two.

A few days later there was a snowstorm. After supper, Hann and Lina sat together, for it was too early for Hann to climb up to his garret. And of late Lina had feared being alone.

"Shall I read some Reuter?" asked Hann.
"Here's *In the Year '13*."¹

She sat on her bed, very tired, her hands resting on her lap. A plait of her black hair hung over her shoulder. As she thought, she played with it.

"No, Hann; I'm not merry to-day."

At that moment something seemed to bound over the roof, there was a howling in the chimney, and they both heard how on the other side of the wall Claus Muchow growled in his sleep.

After a time, Hann, who was snuffing the candle, asked, "If I'm not to read, what shall I do?"

She frowned a little. "Light your pipe, Hann, and stay here a little while."

"Smoke here?"

He thought at first that he had not understood rightly, for until now Lina had always forbidden tobacco smoke; and even now, when she nodded in the affirmative, he did not venture at once to take out his short sailor's pipe. Then the girl got up, and struck a match. "Here," she said, in a toneless voice.

"Oh, Lina!" he replied, greatly touched, and gently stroked her hand.

The tobacco was delicious. He carefully blew the smoke away from him, using his hands when it seemed too thick.

"How delightful it is here to-day!" he ventured to remark, after a while.

She sat on the edge of the bed and played with her hair, without taking any particular heed of him.

¹ *Ut de Franzosentid.*

"How comfortable it is here to-day!" repeated Hann quietly.

She nodded, but absent-mindedly, listening to the storm which was whirling round the cottage, and suddenly remarked with emphasis, "It's quiet in the room."

"In the room, Lina?" He had acquired so keen an ear for her remarks. "But not in your spirit. Is that what you mean?"

She started as if detected, and moved to and fro on the bed. "You should not bother so much about me," she said, embarrassed,—"not always. The main point is if you are content."

"If I——?"

Was it a ghost? Had a human voice said it? Or had one of the little white mice whispered it, who sat in the corners of sailors' rooms when it was quiet and peaceful? And it was peaceful. How delicious the tobacco smelt! How prettily the blue clouds circled round the light! And the beautiful stillness! And the lovely black plait which rested on her shoulder! Hann cast down his eyes in confusion, and pushed away the light as if it blinded him.

And then his companion asked him something which made his heart beat more gladly than a short while since he would have believed possible.

"Hann, the other day you said something about improving."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Have you remembered that, Lina?" he interrupted, half in pride.

"Yes."

She did not look at him, but rubbed her hand unsteadily up and down the edge of the bed. He looked at her, and saw that the plait moved gently. That confused him, and made him glad and miserable. She was the first he had seen. The first woman! How red her lips were! "Like cherries," thought Hann, "or better, like coral." His mother had had a coral brooch.

"Hann, do you think," she asked uncertainly, "that bad people can improve?"

That was it, then! He took the pipe out of his mouth and folded his hands almost reverently. The wind outside sounded to him almost like the tones of an organ. Lina, this beautiful Lina, with the black hair, who was not good—he corrected himself—not quite good—she was examining herself.

"Hurrah!—victory!"

He would have liked to roar out his joy, but he controlled himself and said at once, "Of course, Lina. But why do you ask?"

She struck the pillow impatiently. "Oh, nothing."

"It's quite easy, Lina,—quite easy," he informed her; "but not through punishment and prison."

"Through what, then?"

"Lina, I always think of mother—how good she was. In all except her living body she was an angel. Pastor Witt said so at her funeral. And do you know why? Because she never thought about herself, but sat the whole day thinking of us. Do you see, Lina, that's how it is. A bad man can become a new man, but first he must forget himself—overboard with everything. And he must have some sort of

love either for a cause or for another human being. And when he's quite filled with it he's a new man, he's entirely changed. That's how I understood Pastor Witt."

The girl had jumped up.

"A love?" she repeated in terror. A dull red colour mounted to her forehead.

"Yes, Lina, that's how I explain it," he concluded happily, rubbing his hands.

With one of her swift movements, which were, however, already becoming heavier, she turned to the window, and while she gazed out at the whirling snow she pressed both hands against her forehead and broke out into a painful groaning.

"A love!" she stuttered, as if to herself,—“O God!”

Hann was terrified. “Lina, Lina, is anything the matter?”

At his outburst she turned her pale face towards him. She looked at him for what seemed a long time. Then she went slowly towards him, hesitating, and while her lips trembled, softly stroked his cheek several times.

He was dumb with surprise. He stood before her broad and plump. Anything so beautiful and precious had never happened to him!

“You're a good man, Hann,” she said simply, but her features kept their gloomy expression. And he was quite happy.

But Lina was not always so gentle. Old desires crept round the cottage, and brought disturbance.

There was first a box with the contents of which

she unpacked her former life. When the gay ribbons fell into her hands, and the cheap copy of Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*, she cried aloud. She fell on her knees before the box and embraced the wood.

Where did it come from? From the most honourable place, where nothing but the strictest morality prevailed.

One December morning, shortly before Christmas when the snow was a foot high in the roads, Fräulein Dewitz put on her fur cape, a legacy from Hollander's late wife, drew on pearl-grey gloves, which she considered the only kind fit for a lady to wear, and bade her little servant call a fly.

"To Moorluke," she said to the coachman as she got in, and looked at him quite anxiously.

The coachman in his sheepskin coat looked uncertain.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, "if we can get there. The first time we got to the Steinbeck Gate, and had to turn back, the second time to the barrier, and the third to the curing-houses. I wonder how far we shall get to-day."

"No, no," declared the old lady; "to-day I shall do it. And look after the box for me."

"All right, then, off we go," growled the coachman.

But when the white river-course shone before her, the sewing-mistress's heart began to beat. She would keep on. She pressed her face against her muff, as if not to see or hear anything.

"It's very hard," she whispered to herself, "for one who has all her life guarded against such a thing—but the poor child is almost a sick person, and it's

not necessary to discuss all the dreadful business. No, that's certainly not necessary. One still retains some of the social arts—*savoir vivre*! I wonder how I shall find her."

The horses neighed. Fräulein Dewitz was afraid. Weren't they already past the curing-houses? Yes, indeed they were. Dear Heaven! What will my friends in the town say? Won't they think that I am inclined to befriend such—h'm, the word causes me great uneasiness. I'm old, but quite inexperienced in such matters. And if Dina's aunt refused to visit me? The horses were thundering over the Moorluke temporary bridge.

"Herr Bals—Herr Bals."

"Ma'am?"

"I won't go any farther."

"What did I say now?"

"No, no, I can't; I don't feel well. But take the box over. You know, she lives over there—in that cottage. No, don't say that I'm here."

And so the box came into Lina's possession. She kneeled in front of it while Hann was out fishing, and rummaged about in it, among the memorials and books, as in another, richer life. Fräulein Dewitz had judged rightly. The books seemed to the forsaken girl like fine gentlemen who visited the fisherman's cottage in order to amuse themselves with the beautiful wench.

When Hann, after a stormy day at sea, very tired, entered the room like some enormous wet monster, wrapped closely in fur, he found her sitting on the

edge of the table, a book in her hand. The light stood near her. Her eyes shone.

Hann looked round. He felt helpless at the sight. What did it mean?

"Hann!" she stammered, bewildered.

In his uncertainty he thought he would tell her something. He rubbed his dripping fur coat, and stuttered out, "Our boat drew water. Claus Muchow and I were almost an hour in the ice—I should like something hot."

But at the first moment she did not understand his need, and Hann felt annoyed at her want of sympathy.

"What are you reading?"

"A play."

He clenched his hand. "Are you still thinking of such things?" he broke out roughly. "I thought——" But he suppressed the rest, turned round gloomily, and noisily left the room, in order to ask the Muchows to give him a hot drink. Lina gazed after him, let the book fall, and lost in dreams, looked into the candle-flame.

.
But the profession that attracted her, through its light, frivolous side, was to come still closer.

Old Kusemann stamped into the kitchen. It wanted only a few days to Christmas, and a frost prevailed that made the joints of the cottage crack, and a thin covering of ice spread itself over the walls of the kitchen. But old Kusemann's face was one broad grin, as he held high up a small printed paper he had in his hand.

"Children," he grinned, leaning against the chimney-piece, round which the Muchows and their lodgers sat drinking coffee, "I come to invite you. The actors have arrived. My Alvina has let the garret again to Türkow the director and his betrothed—or maybe his wife. I don't know exactly. But they're very respectable people. Didn't even ask for a stove. And as for her, she's most sociable. They play to-day in the Pöplow Hall. They'll find out how it smokes there. See! *The King of the Alps, and the Enemy of Men*. I'm going to play too. A ghost or something of the sort. And my Alvina plays a witch. It's all quite natural."

"Pancakes!" said Claus Muchow, who meanwhile had been looking at the bill, and now stroked the paper tenderly. "Pancakes!"

"Yes, yes," agreed Frau Sophie; "he likes that kind of thing, and if it's only half as horrible as the story of the old robber in the Hunger Tower—you remember, Claus, how they borrowed our lantern?—then I shall like it too. So let's go."

In the afternoon Lina began to make herself fine. Stealthily before the mirror, she put on here a ribbon, there a brooch. Hann, meanwhile, sat behind the stove, doubled up with pain. The hour in the ice had done its work. He looked over at his companion, but said nothing. Then the solitary oil lamp in the village street was lighted. It threw a reflection into the half-dark room.

Lina could contain herself no longer.

"Are you coming with me?" she began, turning aside as if to get something out of the chest of drawers. Hann rubbed his painful shoulder.

"Where?" he asked shortly.

"You know. To the theatre."

He went on rubbing, doubled up with the pain, without vouchsafing a syllable.

"Hann!" she said crossly. This was a new mood.

Then he growled out of the dark corner by the stove, "I'm in mourning for my mother and Siebenbrod. And you——"

It seemed to her as if his eyes turned away from her in contempt.

"Well, and me?" she asked sharply.

"I mean you oughtn't to show yourself in public," burst unthinkingly from his lips.

Then he groaned again and rubbed his knee.

It was said—the word that divided the outcast from other people. Her physical beauty, her last consolation, her last refuge, was impaired. Lina looked round. Where was she? And was that Hann—Hann always kind, and ready to serve her—who cowered in the corner and revealed her fate to her so roughly? She felt about with her hands, and uttered a low, scarcely audible, inarticulate cry.

"Lina, is anything the matter?"

No answer. She stood with downcast head, beating her finger nails against the table.

"Lina, I'm in such pain—I didn't mean it so."

The noise ceased. She stood motionless, but Hann, who was anxiously observing her, became aware that big tears began to run down her face. He had never seen her cry like that before.

In spite of the pain, he limped up to her.

"Lina, dearest Lina, I only meant to protect you,

and I only said it for the best. In every situation a person must first form a correct picture of himself. Lina, if you're not too angry with me, give me your hand."

He waited some time, and then saw how her fingers slowly moved towards him, and suddenly her cheeks became hot and red ; she seized his arm and asked in a feverish voice, "Have I got so ugly, then, Hann?"

"You, Lina? Oh, heavens——" He did not trust himself to say more.

"You always found me pleasant to look at," she continued thoughtfully, smiling painfully through her tears.

"Yes, indeed, Lina, and I always shall until my dying day."

"Poor Hann—I believe you—poor Hann!"

Then she took off the ribbons and brooches. The drawer creaked, as she put them away. Then they returned to their old places, she by the table, he by the stove, and a long, miserable silence sank over them.

Since then, Lina was quite broken down. She did not leave her room. She sat and thought about herself and Hann. She lay on her bed and wept, waiting impatiently for Hann to come home. For his honest, reasonable talk was the only thing that drove away her fears.

Sometimes she spoke very strangely to him.

"Why don't you talk to me, Hann?"

"Lina, what shall I say?"

"Your voice drives away my fears. It seems then

as if there was a little good in me. There may be something good in me after all, mayn't there, Hann?"

"Oh, Lina—Lina!"

"I try to forget myself, as you told me. Have you noticed it, Hann?"

"Yes. How could I help it, Lina?"

"Hann, I shan't die, shall I? Because I can become a better person, can't I?"

He laughed and cried all at the same time.

"Lina, you're not so clever as you used to be. How can you leave us now?"

"Oh, Hann, I dream about it every night. For I'm standing on the threshold. But, say, if I'm not so clever as I used to be, I'm not so defiant. Aren't you pleased with me?"

"Lina—Lina—you break my heart."

"Be quiet—be quiet."

And they went on sitting together in silence, as if waiting for fate.

CHAPTER VII

LINA'S VICTORY

A DESPAIRING man ran over the snow. He reached the street, pulled the bell, looked round the hall in bewilderment, and then rushed up to the nursing sister who entered, in restrained excitement.

"You, Hann?"

"Lina is dying."

"Heaven forbid!"

"Clara, Clara, it mustn't be—the little child—and I—and—and—why should I keep silence? It seems to me as if you and I, and the whole world, must die together with her."

"I know, Hann,—I know."

Questions were then hurriedly put and answered. To the doctor's for prescriptions, and then the man and the girl, hand in hand, but quite unconsciously, hurried over the snow.

"Clara, she is good—you must believe me, she is good," he stammered, in running.

"And so are you, Hann,—you too. God will help."

"Yes, if He sees how she lies there, then He will certainly help—it couldn't be otherwise."

Close to New York, on the shore of Long Island,

the clerk of the shipbuilding firm of Richards & Co. sat, that same evening, on his stool in the counting-house, and looked through the green sprouts of a vine at the ocean and the setting sun.

It became more and more blue, the wind rustled in the creeper; and the young man fixed his eyes on a distant steamship, which small as a swallow was hurrying across the sea. Then it disappeared amid the foam and mist. Deep in thought, he shook his head, and began to put his papers together, when a ship's carpenter entered the office, who in happy pride asked for his wages, and then held out his hand to say farewell.

"Good-bye,¹ sir." At the sound the other looked up.

"Good-bye? Are you a *Plattdentscher*, Schmidt?"

"Yes, young sir," said the red-haired fellow. "From Wolgast."

The name seemed to strike the clerk, for he got off his stool.

"I didn't know that. And notwithstanding your high wages here," he asked quickly, "you're going back to Germany? Why? Have you a sweetheart there?"

"No, I'm not exactly engaged. When I left she was only just fifteen."

"But perhaps you have brothers and sisters?"

"No, they're all dead; but, sir, I—I"—and the carpenter, embarrassed, rubbed his breeches—"I long for the whole land—for the meadows and flats—and our language."

¹ He uses the *Plattdentsch* expression, *adjuis* (adieu).

A silence fell between them. And as the winter evening sun sent a reddish glow into the room, the man did not notice how pale the clerk had grown. With hesitation he went to his desk and opened it. With a trembling hand he drew out a letter.

"Schmidt," he began, with downcast eyes, "I have had this letter lying here for several months, and have not sent it for various reasons. Will you deliver it at its address? The place is in your neighbourhood. Will you take it over?"

"Certainly, sir," said the man, readily, looking at the superscription. "Hann Klüth—a relative, I suppose? I'll give him your remembrances, sir."

"And the land too," said the other, looking across the sea.

"Of course. The land too. Good-bye."

The sea was Lina's enemy. It was the sea that would not let her get better—the sea that as a child she had always hated.

"The ice will break to-night," said old Kusemann.

"That'll set us all going," added Frau Sophie, who was staying with Hann in the kitchen, in order to rock the baby's cradle. "See, Hann, what black eyes he's got!—just like Lina's. And there, if he doesn't look straight out at the sea!"

"Children can see the storm coming," declared old Kusemann, leaning against the doorpost. "Hann, you ought to get the young mother away from here. What would you do if this place was flooded?"

But Frau Sophie shook her big hand at the sea,

over which the ice-covering still lay. "It shall stay where it is," she shouted,—“mustn't dare. A mere basin of water—we've nothing to fear here.”

“Blacking!” grumbled Claus Muchow, striking the hearth.

And the child began to scream.

“Yes,” murmured the pilot; “you see the infant has a presentiment.”

And Hann, who stood with bent head by the cradle, where he had for some time been looking at the little pink face, began to be afraid of the sea that slept under its ice-covering, and of the great stillness that prevailed round the cottage, and of the unknown which every day set one foot on the threshold and then drew it back. A shudder ran down the strong man's back. He trembled for a moment, so that the others noticed it. The sitting up at night so much had begun to exhaust him.

“Hann,” said Frau Sophie, looking at him, “you ought to lie down.”

He shook his head. “Not until Lina is asleep.”

He went down to the sea to find out the thickness of the ice. Two inches. “It'll hold a bit longer.”

The sea lay in the pale light of the February sun, and squinted with its icy shining eye through the window opposite Lina's bed, so that as she lay there she could not turn away her gaze from its shimmering. She had placed both her hands behind her head, and her burning eyes looked unceasingly through the window-panes. Seemingly unconscious of her action, she whispered, “Well?” And again,

"When are you coming?" Then she beckoned furtively.

Clara Toll, who had been nursing the sick girl for several weeks now, gently took hold of Lina's hand. The invalid was obliged to look up.

The animated look in her bright eyes betrayed how much the slender figure in the nurse's costume, that had formerly filled her with aversion, pleased her now. She looked at the soft brown hair which welled forth beneath the cap almost with longing. Meanwhile Clara had put her arm round Lina's shoulder, so that she could raise herself up.

"Come," said Clara, "don't look out there."

Lina shook her head vehemently, and still looked excitedly towards the window. "You don't understand," she replied softly. "I must wait for it."

"For what, Lina?"

But Lina remained silent, and as she continued to look dreamily at the water, Clara Toll knew from former talks what was occupying the sick girl's thoughts.

Shaken by fever, she had lain there for many weeks; she passionately desired life, a better, more active existence; she felt as if life had cast her aside, and would have none of her. She could do nothing for the new-born babe of whom she had originally had such terror—could not thank Hann in any sort of way, who watched over her unceasingly, like a big, faithful house-dog. And in her feverish dreams she heard the talk of the others about the bursting of the ice, and so Lina lay, and watched continually, as if at something wonderful. She

always turned towards the icy level. And even if she did not give her thoughts voice, her longing eyes said clearly—

“Well?”

And then again—“When are you coming?”

At noon Hann went to her, and when she was aware of his presence she stroked his hand, only to desist directly she remembered that Clara was there. A fugitive smile played round her lips, and she asked him—for it occupied her mind constantly—whether Paul the pastor had given any sign of life? And those in the town? Neither, neither? She already knew Hann's compassionate shake of the head, and stretched herself stiffly on her pillows. Her eyes sought the low ceiling.

The afternoon of that day about which the Moorluke folk still talk, began to grow dark. The two women were alone—Lina on the bed, Clara at its foot, some knitting in her hand. It looked like something very tiny. The yellow February sun lighted up the window-panes. Lina pulled herself up. Her eyes again wandered over the smooth ice.

“Clara!”

The nurse let her work fall into her lap and looked up.

“Clara, what are you making?”

“Socks for the little one, Lina.”

The invalid looked at the work, and put her cheek against it for a moment.

“Yes, yes,” she began hurriedly, “you'll make things for him later on.”

“How, Lina? I'm going soon.”

Lina smiled strangely, and turned again to the sea, over the icy level of which the wind chased grey clouds of snow.

"Do you hear," she said, with curious satisfaction, while she pointed with her finger, "how it howls?"

Then Clara put down her work, and turned her quiet, open features towards her companion. "Lina," she begged, "won't you explain to me why you look out at the ice for hours together?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Because we're all so anxious about it."

"Oh," smiled Lina, and it seemed as if she was going to persist in her reserve, when suddenly she put her lips to Clara's ear, and ran on: "I was so bad, Clara, so bad, you can't think. You know you did not like me. I only thought of my own pleasure, even when others had to pay for it. That went on for a long while, and I did not wish to be any different. Well, and then came the time with Hann, and I don't know how it was, but the goodness in him must possess a power which gradually little by little made me wish I could be like him,—really I am speaking the truth,—and the longing became at last all-powerful. But there is so much to remind me of the former time. The thought of the child and of its father—that always throws me back. And I don't know whether I'm to live or die. And so I lie and wait for the water. It will come, Clara, and if it doesn't take me with it, you'll see, I shall succeed."

Clara shook her head. "Those are mere fantasies," replied the nurse, restraining herself. "The sea won't come. But if there is any one here you love, you

must never speak to him of such things. Promise me that." She put the pillows straight. "It's true, isn't it, you do love Hann?"

Lina started and gazed at the ceiling.

"Not as you do," she returned painfully.

"But you are fond of him?" urged the other.

Lina nodded, and folded her hands.

The nurse came nearer. She was determined to find out what she had long had upon her mind on Hann's account.

"And about Bruno, Lina, do you still think of him? It isn't curiosity that makes me ask."

Lina lay outstretched, and put both hands on her forehead; an inner, violent unrest took hold of her limbs, and again she gave a long wandering look out at the sea.

"And the child?" Clara said with emphasis. "You will want to live for his sake?"

"You mustn't worry me," was groaned out from the pillows. "The water alone knows how all will end."

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At six o'clock in the evening, a stranger came to Hann, who, in his heavy fishing-boots, was sitting alone by the child's cradle. He remained some time. When Frau Sophie came into the kitchen later, it occurred to her that her lodger was still bent over the cradle, rocking it mechanically with his foot, a sheet of paper in his hand on which he looked with an uneasy expression.

Frau Sophie was curious.

"Hann, what are you reading?"

The man heard the sound of the voice, but did not seem to comprehend the sense. A long while after he returned : " A letter."

Frau Sophie saw that for herself, and shrugged her shoulders over Hann's stupidity, for she was very anxious to hear some more.

"Who's it from?" she continued to examine him, with a friendly smile, confidently stretching out her hand, as if she hoped to catch a corner of the paper.

"From a very long distance," replied Hann, still deep in thought, and he quietly folded the paper and put it in his pocket.

"Well, how sly!" the woman blurted out, when she saw it disappear. But she soon recovered her good temper, and with a grin asked Hann if perhaps he had received a legacy or won something in a lottery.

"I should be very glad," she continued, wiping her mouth. "But not only because you owe me thirty shillings, Hann. No, you mustn't think that—indeed you mustn't."

She took the lamp from the mantelshelf and held it in front of her lodger's face. But she was quite terrified when he turned his eyes on her. She saw no joy there—only misery, despair, and entire perplexity. And how deep the wrinkles were in the face far too early old!

He got up more awkwardly than usual, looked round, seized his blue sailor jacket, till he could hear the paper rustle. Then he nodded. Suddenly he spoke, but in a tone which sounded dully from the chest.

"Frau Muchow?"

"Yes."

"Will Lina get better?"

"Hann, who can say? But it seems to me that she will."

"Yes—yes."

He nodded his heavy head several times, and then looked down for a long while. "Yes, yes, now she'll get better and be just as before, and I have——"

"What have you?" urged the woman quickly, as he hesitated. But either because an unexpected howling sound came from the sea, or because the child screamed, Hann shook his head and merely said—

"Look after the child for a bit, Frau Muchow. I must go out and draw my boat up higher. Who knows what the night will bring forth? Very likely something 'll happen."

He thrust on his cap, and went out, stepping carefully into the darkness.

It was a bad hour that Hann had to live through. The devil fought with God; everything that was good in him was sunk in darkness; evil spirits stormed against him from all sides, holding in their claws the little red fluttering flags of sin, as if they wished to plant the banner of hell in this quiet, pure heart.

He sat on the keel of the boat that he had drawn up almost under the wall of the cottage, and as within himself the night outside seemed to be stirring with noises and mysteries—something strange and unusual.

What was that noise? Shots? The dull sound of bursting came from everywhere—stronger, longer, until it became a thunder, as if a fleet of warships were shattering with their guns the cottage in which Lina lay, the coast, and the whole world. And a melancholy, almost mysterious grin passed over Hann's face.

"It's a good thing if the ice bursts like that—floods can't be far behind. Two years ago a little peninsula on the Darst was swallowed up with all the inhabitants and the cattle. What would it matter? The cottages with all they contained would vanish, it would all be perfectly still here to-morrow, and he would have no need to deliver the letter—the accursed thing which rustled in his pocket at every movement—then he would be drowned together with her, and no one—no one—would have anything more to demand."

He felt as if far away out there beyond the night somebody was lurking who would snatch from him what he was holding fast in his feverish hands over the precipice. Hann lifted up his clenched fist in fury and shook it threateningly against the black, blustering ocean!

It was a rough, violent gesture.

"You—you rascal! What do you want? Come here—come here—you shan't be long in my way, I can tell you. What! Haven't you once brought her to shame! Do you want to ruin her entirely?"

Something seemed to break out at sea—a long broad crevasse it must be. The harbour walls cracked.

"It's coming nearer," murmured Hann; "pieces of ice are flying about already. And listen, that must be the water breaking through—it's foaming at the bridge surely; that won't hold long—good—good——"

Lina raised herself on her bed. She was white as snow with expectation and fear, and yet she implored Clara to draw up the blind; she must look out—out there where the thunder rolled. The nurse assured her that there was nothing out there except darkness, but it was of no avail.

"That doesn't matter, Clara; then I can hear."

"Great God, Lina, aren't you afraid?"

"Yes, yes, I'm afraid—but draw it up—ah!"

The blind went up.

She raised herself on her pillows, and stared out with fixed eyes. Hann sat on the keel of his boat leaned against the cottage wall, and held fast to a projection.

The wind began to get up, softly, furtively—then there gradually came a moaning. A violent blast came round the corner and shook Hann's jacket so that Bruno's letter crackled and rustled.

"Accursed paper! won't you be quiet?" The best thing would be to tear it up, and then nobody would know anything about it. "But," said a voice out of the distance, "suppose the other when he wrote was filled with repentance, and Lina was necessary to him, Lina and the child—of which he knew nothing—what then?"

He passed his hands through his hair.

"Hell and the devil, to whom does she really

belong?—to him far away, who deceived her and made her unhappy——”

“I can't find a way out!” he shouted. “If God won't help me, the devil must come.”

And he came, quietly in the midst of the thundering night. What was that? Something rose up from the window behind which Lina lay, a yellow light was thrown over the keel of the boat, far over the muddy snow, far over the wet, boggy meadows, down to where something burst mysteriously, crashingly. And the devil took Hann, and forced him to creep up on to the top of the keel and to look in at the window.

And the devil brought Lina farther out of her bed, partly removing the covering from her, so that the man outside saw the beautiful white neck, as he had never seen a woman's before. And the flood of evil surged up in his heart that had hitherto been a church, altar and organ vanished, and the bells sounded no longer from the dark water. Yes, and to-morrow he would burn the letter and take up his abode with the woman who belonged to him—to him alone—and——

“Lina!”

“Great God!”

What was that hoarse cry within?

The blind was pulled down, the light vanished, darkness prevailed over all. But no, here and there, on the jetty were fiery points, lanterns. Suddenly a glaring red light was seen from the lighthouse. By the search-light pieces of the coast could be seen. But no, there was no more coast. What was forcing itself along so? What made that hissing sound?

"Hann!—Hann!" shouted Frau Sophie above the din from the garret window. Confused voices, sometimes seeming near, sometimes far off, came up from the village. And now the bells could be heard over the roofs from the church tower. How threatening and whimpering they sounded! And the foghorn of a ship in distress groaned from the sea.

"Good—good!"

Hann did not move. He lay stretched out on the keel, clasping the ribs of the boat, his teeth clenched. No, he would save nothing. Since he could never possess the beautiful woman he had just seen, his blood still boiling in his veins from the sight, then the water might cover everything quietly.

What is that? His boat began to move. It must be there already. It totters, groans——

"Hann!—Hann!"

"Yes—who calls?"

The window was torn open behind him—light and the same picture as before. Lina crouched on her knees in her bed and gazed at him. Yes, she recognised him, she saw him, but she did not beckon him to fetch her. Everything in Hann seemed to be buzzing. How dare she die—the friend of his youth?

With one despairing leap Hann jumped through the window. Everything was forgotten—the letter, his doubts, his passionate thoughts.

The water shot forth behind him.

They were all cowering together in the garret. Lina lay stretched out stiffly on Hann's wretched pallet, but her eyes were open and a strange smile

played round her lips. She listened to the gurgling that sounded more and more softly round the house. For after the first burst the water had subsided again.

Claus Muchow had carried the child up in its cradle, and was awkwardly nursing it in his big arms. He would not let any one else take it, and kissed it, and whispered into its ear, "Pancakes—pancakes!"

Otherwise not a word was spoken. Hann stood at the garret window until early morning, watching the subsiding of the water. Here and there the meadows began to appear, the ice had vanished, the morning sun sparkled on the sea, now released from its icy prison; the first foam rolled up snow-white on the shore.

Hann scarcely breathed the fresh air, his heart beat so terribly, and when the paper in his pocket rustled, he turned pale, and remembered his thoughts of the night.

Wrapt in thought, Clara Toll's voice recalled him to consciousness.

"Hann!"

"Yes, Clara."

"Lina wants you."

Hann shook himself and pulled himself together.

"How is she?"

"Better. She has been talking and laughing and caressing the child—and now she wants to say something to you."

"Come, Clara."

Hann stood by the bed, stiff and immovable, until Lina very gently drew nearer to him. Heavens! how her eyes gleamed and shone! Hann could

recognise the old Lina who had danced so prettily to Malljohann's organ.

"Bend down lower," she said.

He bent down.

She pulled his hair about and laughed. "And you carried me up in a blanket, you good fellow? Are you glad I'm going to live?"

He cast down his eyes and struggled with himself. "Yes, Lina, even if I had to lay down my life for yours every minute of the day."

When he said that in a trembling, unsteady voice, Lina looked round quickly for Clara Toll. But she had gone, and they were alone. She put her arm gently round his neck, although the man trembled under the soft caress.

"You dear, stupid creature!" she whispered, "I have never thanked you, but I'm going to do it to-day; for I'm fond of life again—so fond of it."

Her soft cheek neared his. "Yes, Lina," he replied, while he drew himself up straight with difficulty, "life's the greatest thing of all—I know that well enough. But I think we must take it as it comes—make no reproaches, and live quietly. And so, Lina, dearest Lina, take this. Read it attentively—it contains the future of us all—it contains right and wrong, joy and sorrow. But we must take what life gives us. And I've the least right to interfere."

Lina took the sheet with surprise, held it to her, read it; then let her glance wander from the paper to the man who was silently looking out to sea, and then from the man back to the paper.

Everything—right and wrong, farewells and soli-

tude, joy and sorrow—swept through the little room and the souls of its occupants.

It became quite still. Out upon the water Hann saw a boat rocking on the waves.

“Ship, whither are you bound? Is your rudder true? Can you steer yourself?”

EPILOGUE

IT was indeed an unaccustomed sight. Instead of the rickety wooden bridge between Moorluke and the neighbouring village, stately stone arches were to be seen. In the middle it opened up and down with a portcullis, so that big sea-going ships could pass unhindered under the bridge down to the harbour.

A thick-set figure stood in front of the little toll-house in order to take the toll. That, too, was a new building. The man lifted his head. And then—

“Goodness!” I shouted in bewilderment.

“Oh, so you’ve come to see us again,” said Hann, with beautiful philosophical calmness, for it was the chief rule of the guild to which Hann belonged never to be disconcerted. “How are you?”

But I did not find it easy to recover from my astonishment. I cried, “My dear fellow, tell me what you are doing here.”

“Yes,” said Hann, “I earn money here because of a good thought that came to another, and not to me. You’ve to pay a halfpenny each, and threepence for the carriage.”

“That’s so,” threw in old Kusemann; “and it’s a nice quiet business, on which he won’t do badly. Look there!” and he pointed to the place on the shore

where the Klüths' house, which in time of need was sold to the barber, had stood. How nice it looked now!—provided with a side wing, and brightly painted.

Then we sat in Hann's little toll-house, which was so tiny that besides the toll-keeper's seat there was only room for a second wooden chair.

The sea shone through the peep-hole at the back, like a green field dotted with white flowers, while the waves softly plashed at our feet. It sounded so pleasant and homelike and wholesome, and a similar effect was produced by the clouds of blue tobacco smoke hovering round old Kusemann. It was no wonder that I felt extremely comfortable.

"Yes," said Hann, "so it happened. First there is the bridge, that'll surprise you. See what is written on the pillar in copper letters, 'Built by Consul Hollander, 1897'; and that's the actual fact. It was Lina's idea, and the Consul carried it out. And then there are other things in connection as well. For a long time she gave herself no rest because I hadn't the right sort of employment. I was too slow for the fishing,—I let all the others get in front of me,—and it was the same with everything else. And one day, when we were both going over the temporary bridge, beside which lay a ship much too tall to pass under it, the idea of the portcullis bridge struck her. And she described it all to me as if the building already stood there. Quite clearly. 'Yes, yes,' he added proudly, "you should have heard her. And then there was nothing for it but that I must go off to the Consul and lay the scheme of the bridge before him.

You can imagine that I protested for a long time, for the Consul often came to see me with quite a different proposition. He wanted to build me a little sea-going cutter, or four new seine-boats. He wanted to do something, for the money we had paid him always rather weighed on him. But Lina carried it through. One day she left off laughing, and because I feared she might get ill again, I went straight off to Hollander. It wasn't an easy business," continued Hann, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "The Consul made a good deal of fun over my proposal, but four months afterwards I sat here as toll-keeper and took the people's money."

"Good—good!" threw in old Kusemann, winking at me significantly, and slapping his breeches pocket, in order to let me know how prosperous Hann's business was. "How does that fine proverb run? 'A clever woman, a strong horse, a faithful dog, are worth their weight in gold.'"

"A clever woman?" I repeated in bewilderment. My mind seemed all in confusion. "Yes, you go on talking about the bridge, but the most important thing you omit—does Lina still live in Moorluke?"

Hann nodded.

"And—and—don't be vexed, you're not perhaps——?"

"No, not that," said Hann, with a movement, turning crimson.

"But then why did she stay here? Why didn't she go away?"

Hann looked at the pilot, whose presence at this conversation was evidently not agreeable, and got up.

"Yes, that's just the question I ask myself every day. But come," he continued; "you shall see her,—she always liked you,—and on the way I'll tell you more." Old Kusemann was asked to take Hann's place in the meanwhile; he willingly consented, and as Hann and I began to cross the bridge, the pilot called after me that the next day I must of course come and take a spoonful of soup with him.

Hann told the rest. But one thing he never quite understood. He never could explain to himself about the letter. She had read it when she lay so ill, and Hann had overcome temptation at her bedside,—she had read it, and silently put it under her pillow. Hann waited, but she made no decision. She looked at him with a look which implied, "I'm much cleverer than you," and smiled.

She got well so quickly, you would never have believed it possible. She began to walk about the Muchows' cottage, to sing, to dance just like little Lina had done. And Hann's heart danced with her. But then again it would beat in agony, for the hour of parting must be coming nearer, so much the quicker the stronger Lina grew.

"Oh, if you knew," continued Hann, as we crossed the river over which the sun was setting,—“if you knew how hard it was to me to tell myself every day, ‘Now, Hann, you must be ready. When you come home from the sea to-day, you won't find her there; she'll be gone where the letter calls her.’ But no—she became more and more cheerful, and gradually began to help in the house. She took everything in hand,

even down to the least detail. Do you see the little curing-house there? That was built by Claus Muchow and me, by her advice, so that we might smoke the fish there. That brought in something. And when the affair with the bridge came off, Lina was quite beside herself with joy. She danced and sang, I tell you, my dear fellow, till even Frau Sophie could not help laughing. And she saved up penny by penny, and every evening when we sat on the threshold, she looked across to our old house that we sold to Schultz the barber, and said decisively, 'Just a few days more and we'll buy it back again.' And do you see, my dear fellow,"—pointing to the building they were approaching, over which delicate red flowers climbed,—"she was quite right. We've been living there for two years. See, the side wing is new, and the barns. For you must know Lina goes in for agriculture. The big potato-field was laid out that year."

A little flaxen-haired boy, about three years old, with rosy cheeks and black eyes, ran to meet us, clambering up Hann's legs.

"Good-evening," said Hann Klüth.

"His name is Hann?" I asked.

"Yes," replied my guide, a little embarrassed. "It was Lina's wish," he added proudly. "Isn't he a one for learning? He knows all his simple multiplication tables."

"Don't be vexed, but do you live here alone with Lina?"

Hann stopped and heaved a big sigh. "What do you think?" he returned. "The Muchows are living with us."

"Well, and what do the Moorluke people say to it all?"

"Oh," replied Hann, with a contemptuous wave of the hand, "as the others live here, they find it quite correct."

"Beautiful! But, Hann, haven't you any ideas yourself? We sat on the same bench at the village school, that's why I ask."

Then Hann raised his head, but when his glance fell on the pleasant-looking house which seemed to stand out against the setting sun, he bent it again, and murmured, "I can't explain it, but it all seems to me like a dream, and as if it wasn't time to wake up yet."

I took his arm. "I'm sure, Hann, life's got something better in store for you. And you'll soon wake up."

When the moon rose on the other side of the river, and spread her glittering net over the water, when the birds flew homeward and the sea breezes played round the house, we three sat in silence on the bench by the wall.

"Isn't it quiet here?" said Lina, interrupting the stillness. The girl seemed to me more beautiful than ever.

I nodded.

"Yes," she said, "I've learned that from Hann's example. It isn't wise to let our desires stray at random. Retirement, peace, and activity are, I know now, the things after which men should chiefly strive."

But Hann shook his head.

"No, Lina, it's not quite that. I've often thought

about happiness, but it's all been false." He turned to me. "Do you remember what we were talking about this afternoon? Now I know what it is a man can't live without. Do you know? Well, just such a beautiful dream—such a beautiful hope. That's the happiest and the highest thing on earth."

"So it is," I was going to agree, when I saw Lina stroke Hann's cheeks and whisper smilingly, "Isn't he a silly old dear? or is he really a philosopher?"

Then I knew that hope was hovering close to Hann.

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This is the story of Hann Klüth.

It does not end artistically, because the great truth is—life is "without end."



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